

VIDURA

A JOURNAL OF THE PRESS INSTITUTE OF INDIA

ISSN 0042-5303

January-March 2013

Volume 5 Issue 1 Rs 50



CAST ADRIFT,
SHE HAS
TO FEND
FOR HERSELF

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Self-regulation: It's all about discipline really

Are journalists in India mostly law-abiding and respectful of the truth? Is self-regulation enough? Perhaps not. In this connection there has been a lot of interest in what Lord Justice Leveson had to say, based on his inquiry (investigations into phone-hacking and bribery of policemen) in the Maily Dowler case. Many will agree with Alan Rusbridger's (editor of the *Guardian*) view that there are no takers for a "statutory underpinning" for an independent regulator as Lord Justice Leveson seems to have indicated. The fear is that such a move could deprive the Fourth Estate of its freedom and pave the way for some sort of parliamentary control. One thing is quite clear, though: media is still quite powerful.

This is borne out by B.G. Verghese in his article; he says the feeling that media is under siege by both government and the courts and that it faces an imminent threat to freedom of expression is a rather exaggerated view of the reality; on the contrary it has now acquired first strike capability that even governments and courts do not possess. Verghese is of the view that self-regulation is not enough. He points out that the notion media regulation is absent in democratic societies is a complete myth.

P.N. Vasanti, in an open letter to the minister for Information and Broadcasting, seeks transparency in ownership and business transactions in the media, and accountability. Lack of it has affected the quality of content that is now offered across different mediums and competition has resulted in catering to the lowest common denominator, she says.

Is the market responsible for newspaper and TV content? Do marketing and ad sales departments apply pressure on editorial departments to drop stories that harm advertisers? Ranjona Banerjee suggests that the advertiser/marketer can be a direct threat to responsible journalism and that it is naive to assume that market forces alone will take care of media responsibility. In fact, media has a larger role to play in society than pandering to market requirements, she says.

M.B. Lal says there is a lot happening in district towns and in the countryside, which if reported, could make a difference to the quality of life in India. Am not quite sure whether many will agree with the first part of his premise, that newspapers should take decisions about what people need to know; but most will agree with the second, that newspapers should not be dictated by what pleases and titillates an audience. He echoes Banerjee's view, saying newspapers are "keen not to annoy powerful advertisers and authorities from whom media houses seek lucrative returns for services rendered".

S. Muthiah talks about the Samir Jain school of journalism that has made *The Times of India* the leading English language newspaper in the world. It was Jain who introduced the concept of marketing a newspaper as a commodity. But for a commodity to be successfully marketed, the product has to meet the test of quality. And the quality standards he has set are based on what he thinks the reader wants and not what "intellectual editors sitting in ivory towers" think the buyers of their papers should read, says Muthiah.

V.S. Maniam feels newspapers and magazines can face the digital 'threat' by sticking to its core principles. A newspaper, he (like Lal) says, should fashion readers' tastes, not the other way around. Providing examples of the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker* and the *National Geographic*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, he says it indeed possible to survive

and master change. How? By having interesting features, attractive photographs, arresting graphics, maps and charts, perhaps chatty pieces, and of course raising the bar on the quality of colour and printing as these publications have done.

When Arun Ramkumar's illustration for the cover page arrived, I wasn't able to interpret it completely. He then came up with a seven-point explanation that covered most of the sentiments expressed here by various writers, who have dwelt on what surely must be India's most shameful baggage. Ramkumar's illustration shows marginalised women largely left alone to fend for themselves. The sharks, he explains, represent the male and "how in such a vile society a woman has to fend them off to go places". The 'boat-eye' shed's tears/blood; it has been ignored for so long that it's like an ocean of sorrow. The moon is a mere onlooker, representing the indifferent public or police force, people who appear concerned but don't really do much to help. The clouds and bolts of lightning symbolise the storms that often rage in a woman's life. The oar is symbolic of the female form; it represents women's rights groups and such and indicates that there's only so much they can do. There has to be an all-encompassing change before calm can set in and women are able to sail smoothly. Utopia?

The Delhi rape case seized a nation's conscience because it happened in the capital and because it was just too horrific. Even today, we are numbed by the shock of what the girl endured. Aren't rapes and molestation of women happening every other day, in other cities, in towns, in villages? Banning skirts in school is not the solution. What about girls and women in New York or London or Paris or even in Dubai? Don't they wear skirts or shorts? But none of those cities finds a place in the list of rape capitals. How's that? The point is many men in India have one rule for their wife, daughter and sister and another for all other women. They can watch porn and do the vilest things but their wife and daughter shouldn't wear a skirt. A woman can look seductive in a nine-yard Kanchipuram sari; so it's certainly not the skirt that will herald a new era of change. It's the mindset that has to change and, frankly, that's unlikely to happen in a hurry.

The media has a huge responsibility here. After the rape in Delhi, there was, as expected, an overkill. It was as if editors forgot that children of impressionable age also read newspapers and watched TV. Also, 'rape', 'sexual assault', 'molest', etc have different meanings. Self-regulation, nay discipline, went out through the window.

Bringing a wide perspective to a shameful malaise (atrocities against women) in our society are A.J. Philip, Sakuntala Narasimhan, U. Vasuki, P.N. Vasanti, Pamela Philipose, Pratiksha Baxi, Vibhuti Patel and Shoma Chatterji.

In the midst of gloom and doom, here's wishing readers a Happy New Year.

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Balance in reporting privacy and profit



B.G. Verghese

The Indian media has come to feel that it is under siege by both government and the courts and that it faces an imminent threat to freedom of expression and the citizen's right to know. This is a rather exaggerated view of the reality, an important part of which is that with rapidly advancing communication technology, media has moved from being the Fourth Estate to the First. Its instant, universal and global reach across all jurisdictions has invested it with a degree of power or first strike capability that even governments and courts do not possess.

To the ills of official excesses and judicial overreach one must now add an element of media hubris. This has affected orderly governance and social harmony even to the point of threatening institutional integrity and anarchy in the name of popular sovereignty – the citizens' absolute and untrammelled right to know, with a TRP/marketing bonus on the side if you don't mind.

Privacy is a prized individual right, though it is equally established and accepted that the private affairs of public individuals cannot be always or entirely legitimately hidden behind this curtain. Likewise, reputation, another precious right, is built on people's knowledge of a particular individual or institution and so must not only be, but be seen to be, above suspicion. Institutional privacy and reputations cannot therefore be lightly breached by the media without attracting consequences if made public without due diligence in framing or insinuating charges and permitting due process of law where relevant. Thus, trial by the media cannot be allowed to result in prior prejudice or a mistrial or justice by a lynch-mob.

Since these cannons of prudent and fair reporting and commentary have increasingly been breached by sections of the media, though not all, it is not surprising that there should be calls for regulation. Self-regulation is to be encouraged but is clearly insufficient. And the notion that media regulation is absent in democratic societies is a complete myth and betrays a degree of ignorance about the world in which we live. Despite unfortunate attempts at control from time to time, the Indian media is by and large among the freest in the world and in some ways enjoys or has assumed a degree of licence that is worrying. Thus, cabinet papers, file notings, commission reports, CAG findings and the progress of preliminary criminal investigations are often prematurely leaked and revealed with impunity and immunity all round. Much of this is obviously motivated by disgruntled elements or vested interests with the intent to shift the focus of attention, rewrite the agenda, promote red herrings and mislead public opinion at the cost of innocent victims. Whistle blowers and, in special circumstances, genuine sting operators acting out of public interest need protection.

It is for this reason that the Supreme Court has opined that if a trial court magistrate senses danger of mistrial, he/she may approach a superior court to order that part or aspects of the trial shall not be reported in the interests of justice. This is unlikely to be an everyday experience and it is not the case that the superior courts will in all cases blindly accede to the lower court's request. The courts have over the years been zealous protectors of

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press freedom and have expanded its width and ambit. It would therefore be churlish to suspect mala fides on their part.

Rather more controversial nevertheless, but not without reason, is the Supreme Court's direction that RTI Commission benches should include persons with judicial backgrounds as issues of law and legal interpretation are involved. These directives are not intended to usurp power or curb RTI but are intended to streamline processes. How to constitute selection panels needs to be settled. These issues may certainly be debated but should not be rejected ab initio. Civil servants are admirable people with great and

wide experience. But they are not the sole fount of wisdom.

Objection has also been taken to the prime minister's caution that RTI cannot prevail over the right to privacy and that it should not be used for vexatious queries and fishing expeditions. These observations too are not without merit as also his observation that public-private partnerships to serve a public purpose may also need some protection so as not to undermine the public interest, even as blanket exclusion could undermine the accountability of public officials.

The expert group on the right to privacy headed by Justice A.P. Shah has reported that invasion of an

individual's right to privacy may be condoned if this is occasioned by "journalistic purpose" and the citizen's right to know. However, the committee has left it to the Press Council and Indian Broadcast Standards Association to determine whether and what public purpose is involved. While this process will throw up a body of case law in due course, it would be more satisfactory were there clear guidance on what constitutes public purpose if and when the media invades privacy. Here again, the values of a free press versus that of a fair trial must be delicately balanced.

We have before us recent cases like those of Salman

Khurshid, Robert Vadra and Nitin Gadkari, in all of which personal relationships to persons in high places has been cited as validating the concept of public purpose. However, the answer here in each case would be to issue a public contradiction, seek redress from available media councils or file a defamation suit. Salman Khurshid and Navin Jindal, Congress MP, have both straightforwardly sued their tormentors. Robert Vadra strangely left his defence to the Congress Party and the Haryana Government, after a puny personal effort on his own. This, in a sense, has in some ways justified what his critics allege is the public nexus to which they point.

Nitin Gadkari has been both defended and ignored by the RSS and BJP, but the party's president is not helped by the repetition of

his own statement in the case of Yeddyruappa to the effect that the then Karnataka chief minister's action in the mining scam was immoral though not illegal. Equally disturbing has been Congress general secretary Digvijaya Singh's remark in defence of Vadra to the effect that the Congress also knew about certain improprieties committed by Vajpayee's adopted son and Advani's daughter but the party never washed the rival leader's family dirty linen in public. Is that morality does not matter for one while the other observes a strict code of honour among thieves. Are these to be our standards of public life?

As a footnote, let us note events. First, the Jindal vs Zee TV case shows that paid news and private treaties continue to flourish to the media's enduring shame. And

secondly, the latest ADR analysis of the self-certified assets of election candidates across parties in Himachal Pradesh shows both wealth running into crores, in some cases revealing a doubling and more of the assets of re-contesting candidates, and self-certified charges of serious crime in an uncomfortably large number of cases. Himachal seems to be growing truly golden apples this season! ■

A focus on health issues

The International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) has for the past four years, alongside its annual conference, been conducting a special programme for journalists. It is called the J2J Programme on Lung Health which is generally a three-day training workshop organised by the National Press Foundation and The Union. Last year, it was held in Kuala Lumpur in November. The Journalist-to-Journalist programme is a comparatively new implementation of an exciting idea – the idea of journalists mentoring their colleagues. J2J creates an international playing field so that journalists around the world can work together to increase global coverage of pressing issues. Experienced journalists, mentor reporters and editors discuss, debate, argue, question and elaborate on issues they might be struggling with. The goal is the same whatever the issues at stake – (a) improved press coverage (b) covering different media – radio, television, the Internet, print, and (c) working towards increased knowledge in the public domain. After each programme, the audio and PPS presentations, handouts, photos, videos and other resources are posted on the Press Union website <http://nationalpress.org>.

Last year, 19 fellows were chosen for the J2J Programme from fields as wide-ranging as health, lifestyle, science, medicine, current affairs, environment, climate change and even cinema drawn from all media agencies like television, radio, print and the internet mainly from across developing nations. Participating countries were India, China, Russia, Singapore, Malawi, Philippines, South Africa, Chile, Australia, Uganda and Indonesia. The 3-day programme was designed for working journalists who want to increase their knowledge and skill at developing stories on lung health and related issues including tuberculosis, TB-HIV, asthma, COPD and other non-communicable diseases, childhood TB and tobacco control. Low- and middle-income countries formed the focus of attention geographically and culturally speaking because they people of these countries are the most vulnerable to these diseases and have lower access to medicine and medical infrastructure. ■

Please create systems of accountability



P.N. Vasanti

Dear Mr Tiwari,
Congratulations on becoming the Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting. There is overwhelming excitement on such a young, bold and dynamic person taking charge of this very important ministry. I hope the openness and boldness you have demonstrated in your political career will have influence in making this ministry more effective.

Your party and you have on numerous occasions celebrated the ushering of the rights regime in an era of transparency in our country. This is the framework that is required for the unique role of your ministry in this current phase of media and entertainment industry in our country. Your predecessor also realised this and sowed the seeds by ushering in digitisation. The attempt to introduce Digitally Addressable Cable TV was also driven for greater transparency and accountability within the broadcasting sector.

However, a lot remains to be desired regarding transparency on ownership and business transaction in this sector. In spite of becoming a vital commercial sector with important social and political implications, this industry is the least liable. Other than the few listed companies, information on establishment and ownership is limited. The increasing number of players and the dynamic scenario of this sector has made this even more complex and ambiguous.

This is also true regarding figures to do with viewership or readership. While there are various industry estimates, there is no authentic database available. For example, in spite of the ministry being the licensing authority, it will be unable to establish the number of actual television channels available in our country from the 821 licences already issued by 2011 December. Similarly, the Registrar of Newspapers in India (RNI) is unable to provide an update on less than 10 per cent of the registered newspapers/dailies. Unlike in the case of telecom, there is no regular updated information on the broadcasting industry, let alone research on performance and quality. Unfortunately, there are no reliable research inputs or dependable sources (without conflicting interests), leaving the ministry susceptible to various lobbies.

The impact of this lack of transparency is evident in the content that is now served across different mediums, including film, television and print. Competition has led to catering to the lowest common denominator instead of using the mediums for 'educating or empowering the people of India to be informed citizens' as envisioned by your ministry.

Even worse, the misuse and abuse of these mediums is increasingly becoming evident. The recent case of ZEE News and Jindal Steel highlights the spread and depth of erosion within the news media.

The news media's hyperventilation and sensationalisation has led to a unique case of vulnerability. The opaque nature of the industry has given birth to numerous irresponsible and illicit activities. Ironically, the proactive role taken up recently by news media in bringing out various

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corruption scams, has renewed and reminded all of its relevance in our democracy.

Measured by the same yardstick, media itself needs to be accountable in its commercial and professional dealings. Not only news media (television and print) but the whole media and entertainment industry (films, television, radio, music, advertising, gaming, etc) needs to demonstrate accountability to revive credibility and to reconnect with increasingly discerning consumers. There have been various attempts by your ministry to bring in various bills and clauses to increase transparency in this sector. However, most of them have been ad hoc and have not been pursued to logical conclusions / alternatives.

One suggestion that you can take as a lead and implement is to create a public portal with all relevant information regarding ownership, infrastructure and performance indicators across all media sectors (including advertising agencies, production houses, and corporate, political and religious organisations). Going beyond existing information on your ministry website, this portal needs to create a framework for regular updates on performance and balance sheets of all media companies. This will require compiling and integrating information from various sources, including the corporate affairs ministry, the income tax department, various licensing and certification authorities, etc.

Such an initiative will not only help industry and academia but will also create systems of accountability for any public scrutiny. It will provide critical impetus to the transparency mandate and will also address the conflict of interest issues prevailing in the media today. This simple yet critical initiative can change the face of media as we now know in our country.

I write to you in anguish as a concerned citizen, media scholar and as someone who has faith in the immense potential all media have in addressing our national challenges. ■

Sincerely

Vasanti

Statement about ownership and other particulars about "VIDURA" the English Quarterly Newspaper, Chennai, as required to be published under Section 19-D Sub-Section (b) of the Press and Registration of Books Act read with the Rule 8 of the Registration of Newspapers (Central Rules) 1956

**Form IV
VIDURA - Quarterly**

- 1. Place of publication** : Chennai
2. Periodicity of Publication : Quarterly
3. Printer's Name : V.B.S. Mony
Nationality : Indian

Address
No. 10/2 Second Loop Street
Kottur Gardens
Chennai 600 085

- 4. Publisher's Name** : V. Murali
Nationality : Indian

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- 6. Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper/magazine and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of the total capital:**

The Press Institute of India - Research Institute for Newspaper Development
RIND Premises, Taramani, CPT Campus
Chennai 600 113

Shareholding of more than one percent of the capital does not arise as the **The Press Institute of India - Research Institute for Newspaper Development**, is a non-profit society registered under the Societies Act No. XXI of 1860.

I, V. Murali, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

V. Murali
Publisher

24.01.2013

Media is responsible, not the market



Ranjona Banerjee

There is a feeling that one way to combat media ‘irresponsibility’ and thereby improve credibility is to use the advertiser as a regulator. The discussion started after the tragic fiasco of the joke gone wrong when the Australian radio station 2 Day FM phoned a London hospital pretending to be the Queen to get details about Kate Middleton, Duchess of Cambridge’s pregnancy. As a result – though obviously not intended – the nurse who took the first call and believed the hoax committed suicide. The prank led to advertising being suspended.

However, interesting as this sounds, it can only be a temporary or one-off measure to monitor or control media behaviour. If anything, advertising has had no effect on media transgressions in India, judging from the success of those media houses which indulge in dodgy practices like ‘paid news’ or Medianet and its variations.

The advertising industry in India is either unconcerned or unaffected by the vehicles they use to sell their products. Indeed, the recent debate in India over attitudes to women and overarching patriarchy in the aftermath of the Delhi gang-rape of December 16, 2012 has shown the advertiser wanting in the way it portrays women. Much blame is often heaped on Bollywood but the advertising industry with its pride in its subliminal messaging also plays its part.

The idea that the advertiser determines content is in itself rife with contradictions. One presumes that advertisers were very happy with the 2 Day FM radio station which is well known for its pranks until this one went too far and someone died. Certainly, a death in this context could well have made the editorial team rethink its strategy. But every time people have complained that Indian television news has gone too far, has the advertising for that channel correspondingly dropped? If that were the case, channels like India TV may well have gone off the air ages ago, with its snakes and ghosts and amazing sensationalisation. But if viewers like what they see, the advertiser will follow. In the case of 2 Day FM, it was the enormous public backlash that made advertisers pull the plug rather than any great sense of responsibility.

Can the market be made to bear the responsibility for newspaper and TV content? Many advertisers are happy to pay for favourable content and are pleased with unfavourable content about their competitors. Many have no qualms about threatening journals or channels if they feel that stories have not favoured them or have exposed them. These threats led to the marketing and ad sales departments pressuring editorial to drop stories that harm their advertisers. There is no sign here at all that the “market” is a good agency to make the media less irresponsible.

Indeed, one could well argue that the advertiser and marketer can be a direct threat to responsible journalism. Every advertiser who has agreed to take part in an advertorial feature has shown that he or she is ready to take the reader or viewer for a ride. These show pieces are only advertising masquerading as journalism and are a con. There is almost no sense of market responsibility as far as the credibility of news is concerned. Advertisers are concerned about bad publicity and that radio show did get a lot of bad publicity after Jacintha Saldanha killed herself.

(The Mumbai-based writer is a consulting editor with mxmindia.com. She was earlier senior editor, DNA, and deputy resident editor, The Times of India.)

It is indeed naive to assume that market forces alone will take care of something as potentially dangerous as media responsibility. If advertisers are driven, as they are, by TRPs and readership figures, then anything that ratchets up the eyeball count would be fair game. Is the warmongering on TV going to stop because Britannia or JK Cement (just two random names) decide that peace with Pakistan is a better idea?

In fact, if advertising had sufficient responsibility towards its own profession, have the sexist, regressive advertisements we have around us today would be off air and off print. Let us not even get into discussions about truth in advertising. All those products that promise to make your skin perfect, change your melanin count, grow hair on a bald head or make you thin... Those who saw Prasoon Joshi, head of McCann Erickson, on TV during discussions on the gang-rape and whether the media can help change gender attitudes in India would have seen how reluctant he was to address the subject. He made some anodyne remarks about sensitisation but his basic stance was that whatever

sells would be used. This is a man considered to more aware of the world around him than other hardened marketing types, a creative soul who misses few chances to read out his poems at times of national crisis. As it happened, he also read about a poem at a public rally in Mumbai protesting against the rape.

The media has a larger role to play in society than pander to markets and to the lowest common denominator – which was what most advertising has to do to sell products. It is bad enough with managements running newsrooms. To say the market will decide responsibility is actually in a roundabout way saying that people will not like what they will not like. In which case, they always have the option to stop watching x channel or reading y newspaper. As all of us in the media know, the lower the content the higher the eyeballs. That is human nature.

Indeed, you only have to look at most of the rubbish which comes out of Bollywood – with full market support – to know just why this won't work. At the same time, we have to make a distinction between irreverence – which is

what 2 Day FM was aiming for – and irresponsibility, which is what it became. A little more thought at an edit meet perhaps and it would have been clear that schoolboy humour has its time and place and that is nowhere near the mainstream media. While there is no way the death of Saldanha could have been foreseen, the radio station could have considered that pranks like this work better when the target is a public figure, well used to public ridicule and praise both. In this case, whoever picked up the phone in the hospital became the target.

Ultimately, responsibility in the media has to be the media's responsibility. It would be foolish to hand it over to an unreliable agency or to anyone at all. Every mistake made has to be paid for and then redressed. The News of the World was such a big mistake that it had to shut down. For the rest, there are chances to learn and move on. ■

Chameli Devi Jain Awards: nominations invited

The Media Foundation, New Delhi is pleased to invite nominations for its annual Chameli Devi Jain Awards for an Outstanding Woman Mediaperson for 2012-13. Journalists in the print, broadcast, and current affairs documentary film media are eligible, including photographers, cartoonists and newspaper designers. Names and addresses of sponsors or references should be clearly mentioned with email and phone numbers. The criteria for selection will be excellence, analytical skill, social concern, insights, style, innovation, courage and compassion. Other things being equal, preference will be given to small town/rural and Indian language journalists. The entries will be evaluated by an independent panel of jurists whose verdict shall be final.

Nominations should include a bio-data (with complete postal address, telephone, fax numbers and email address, for facility of communication), together with samples of work done during 2012-13 in the form of clippings/tapes/CDs in standard formats. These should be accompanied by a brief appreciation of why the candidate is especially deserving of recognition. Nominations addressed to B.G.Verghese, C-11 Dewan Shree Apartments, 30 Ferozshah Road, New Delhi 10001 should be received not later than February 18, 2013. The award will be announced some days before the Award is presented at the India International Centre Auditorium in Delhi on March 20, 2013. ■

Newspapers were made for News First



M.B. Lal

Recently, I was thrilled to read a five-column feature in *The Hindu* about the Allahabad Museum. I was not aware that it had acquired the status of a national museum some years ago. It pleased me because I spent six formative years of college and university education, from 1945 to 1951, in Allahabad. The museum was then housed in a small bungalow behind the railway station in the civil lines. *The Hindu* story reminded me of art pieces (not mentioned in the feature) such as a room containing the paintings of Nicholas Roerich and Amrita Sher Gil and the centre of the main room where a big glass case containing some rare gifts given to Jawaharlal Nehru during his tours before Independence were displayed. Allahabad was Nehru's home town and being a historian he took much interest in the museum. Many of those old exhibits may have been removed by now. Mr Kala, the then curator of the museum, had personally taken me around the place though I was then only an editor of a student magazine.

I felt grateful to the paper for having taken the trouble to send a correspondent to Allahabad to do the feature. My gratitude to *The Hindu* for doing the feature was, however, shortlived. I soon remembered that only a few months ago the paper had started publishing an edition from Allahabad. It was a local feature, which the Delhi paper had picked up. Until the start of its new edition Allahabad was merely a district town for the paper where nothing much happened.

I have given this illustration to show that national dailies do not realise that the bulk of their readers in metropolitan cities are migrants from other towns and villages who would love to read news about their home towns. An Indian living in America or England perhaps gets more news about India from the national dailies of those countries than a man from Varanasi, Kanpur or Amritsar does, about his city in the English dailies of New Delhi. Today Indian newspapers are totally metro-centred. Besides the main paper, they publish large daily supplements about the doings of local celebrities in diverse branches of art, fashion, design and, of course, TV and movies. There has to be a bomb blast resulting in several deaths in a district town to make news worth publishing in a national English daily. You can peruse your favourite English newspaper for several days before coming across a district dateline.

A comparative study of the newspapers of today and those of 30-50 years ago will reveal several interesting facts about modern journalism. Before listing some of them, I would like to compliment Mr Samir Jain and Mr Vineet Jain, the two brothers who own *The Times of India*, the world's largest circulated English daily, for frankly admitting they had dismantled the wall between the editorial and advertisement departments since their main business was not News, but Advertising. They said this to Ken Auletta, media critic for the *New Yorker* magazine: "We are not in the newspaper business. We are in the advertising business." After interviewing other editors and newspaper owners, Auletta says in his article (Why Indian Newspapers are Thriving?) that the pattern set by *The Times of India* is being followed by other newspapers in India. He quotes Krishna Prasad, editor-in-chief of *Outlook* Magazine, as saying, "those who deny this fact are simply lying". This then is the first major change between the newspapers

(The writer, after an M.A in English from Allahabad University in 1951, joined the Nagpur Times as staff reporter the following year. In 1955, he moved to The Tribune as special staff reporter. In 1957, he joined The Statesman where he would spend 31 years, serving the paper as staff reporter, special correspondent, chief-of-bureau, development correspondent and assistant editor. He now lives in New Delhi.)



Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

of 50 years ago and today. Auletta reports that BCCL, publishers of *The Times of India* and owners of one of the largest media empires in the world, declare a profit of 25-30 per cent against an average of five per cent profit earned by large media companies in America. Major advertisers and buyers of consumer goods in India are to be found only in the metros and state capitals. So why waste space, time and money on the districts?

According to the Jain Brothers' interview with the *New Yorker*, instead of writing editorial material their staff reporters write "advertorial" stories; that is, pure advertisements in the form of news stories. Journalistic ethics apart, who will then write hard news? A quick look at any newspaper today will show that it is packed with photo features narrating the activities of celebrities who have probably paid for it. Editorial departments of major newspapers in Delhi open at 3 pm and shut down before midnight. Gone are the days when any newspaper office would be open round the clock.

Single-column news items have virtually disappeared. Three-to-five column spreads or banner

headlines covering the whole page are the order of the day. Each page is full of features written by experts or columnists and accompanied by large pictures or cartoons. A whole tribe of external contributors and 'essay' writers has sprung up to fill the pages which were reserved for news in the old days when big national newspapers had a correspondent in every district town in the circulation area. *The Tribune*, a provincial paper where I worked for two years before joining *The Statesman* in 1957, had a correspondent in every tehsil of undivided Punjab. Every newspaper had a district desk which handled the page called District News, or News from Districts.

Incidents which seem insignificant now but which can be blown up into big movements if repeated in other places, keep happening all the time across India. The police in every state routinely refuse to register cases of crime committed by gangs known to them. Extortion of money from shopkeepers by goons backed by political parties, rapes and gang-rapes, thefts, missing property, illegal trespass, encroachments on government and private property,

even dacoities, go unreported. Student movements turning violent is a common occurrence. It attracts the attention of the media only when some one gets killed, such as in the case of Professor Sabharwal of Indore who lost his life when agitating students attacked him.

Even more important, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the entire belt bordering Nepal, from Pilibhit in the west to Siliguri in the east, is seething silently, with underground activities of Maoist and Naxalite groups. The groups terrorise rural areas, store guns and ammunition and extort money from local people. The media has chosen to sleep over it. Like the last Mughal emperor of Delhi, they will wake up only when the enemy comes knocking at the gates of the capital.

This is precisely what happened when following gang rape of a hapless girl in a moving bus in Delhi, the whole nation broke out into a riot of protests on a scale never seen in India since Independence 65 years ago. It was the sudden outburst of accumulated anger of the women in the whole country against a crime which was being repeated every day, a crime no one was bothered about until now. Even the media chose to ignore it. Often the perpetrators are known to the police or manage to influence the outcome with heavy bribes. The result: the culprits go scot-free.

Britain has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. One of the primary reasons is the alertness of its newspapers in reporting even trivial acts of misdemeanour or crime. Besides, a whole tribe of 'citizen journalists' has come into existence. It comprises ordinary people who are ever ready to provide reports and pictures of some crime or accident, certainly risking their lives sometimes. They would stop being active if newspapers didn't encourage them.

Apart from crime and court rulings, there is a lot else happening in district towns and in the countryside, which, if reported, can make a difference to the quality of life in India. Newspapers were started as leaders and builders of public opinion and taste, not as followers. They took their own decisions about what people needed to know and were not dictated by what pleased and titillated an audience. Unlike movies, they were not meant to be box-office hits. They were conscious of the people's right to information, which in today's information age is being routinely and willfully suppressed by newspapers who are keen not to annoy powerful advertisers and the authorities from whom media houses seek lucrative returns for services rendered.

As a person who has practised this profession for nearly 65 years now, I would like to say that newspapers should always follow the principle of News First. Where are the single-column stories that were once the pride of the front pages of the *London Times* and *The Hindu* of the Madras of old? Time was when the abdication of the throne of England by the Prince of Wales would have been a single-column story in the two papers. Even a small-single column item when published in a national daily becomes a matter of record and debate among the small number of persons concerned with it, right up to the level of a state or Central minister. So much is happening in both the private and public sectors in the interior, beyond the metros. A large number of NGOs are doing exemplary work. Every development is not worthy of a feature. But whenever they do something special, it should be recorded in a fitting story.

Special correspondents are posted in state capitals who report mainly political developments. Every newspaper in Delhi has a correspondent in Jaipur. *The*

Hindu, for example, has a bureau, till recently headed by a deputy editor. But it appears they seldom move out of Jaipur. Recently, a close friend and his wife visited Mount Abu, the only hill station in Rajasthan. In British times it used to be the summer capital of the Bombay Presidency. Besides being famous for its sunrise point overlooking a lake, it houses the ancient Dilwara Temple, a beautiful piece of Jain architecture. It also houses the international headquarters of the Brahma Kumari movement and the Indian Police Academy which trains IPS officers for the whole country. My friend says that though a tourist spot the place stinks. Garbage heaps are scattered all over the town. Rajasthan is a tourism-conscious state. The government will certainly act and set things right if newspapers report about it.

These days, special correspondents posted in the states sometimes produce stories of important events in the districts with the dateline of the state capital. For example, a Jodhpur story would appear with a Jaipur dateline. Which means, the story had landed on the

desk of the reporter or he had got the information over the phone. As a state correspondent based in Lucknow and Chandigarh I always went to the spot to do a story, even if it was some 200 miles away. These days, even elections are covered sitting in the office. I had to tour the interior of almost every district in the state allotted to me. For background information, I found the local correspondents of news agencies and language dailies most useful. They were always friendly and cooperative.

One of the best jobs I have had was that of a resident teacher of English in Manav Bharti, a Santiniketan-style residential public school in with about 40 boarders and a dozen teachers, for four months from June to September 1954 in Mussorie, then known as the Queen of the Hills in the Himalayas. On Independence Day, we had a festival consisting of a street dance within the campus, daylong music and the painting of a patriotic mural on a rock bordering the playground. I sent a report of the event to the *Hindustan Times*. It was promptly published and read all over the hill town. ■

Thomas Jacob is COO, WAN-IFRA

Thomas Jacob has been promoted to the new position of chief operating officer of WAN-IFRA. Jacob previously served as one of the three deputy CEOs. He will report to the CEO, Vincent Peyregne and will be responsible for operational management and business development worldwide. Jacob brings more than 28 years of experience in media. He began his career as a rookie engineer with *Mathrubhumi*. After helming the technical department for four years, he moved to Singapore to establish IFRA's presence in Asia. During the tenure, he established the two subsidiaries IFRA Asia and IFRA India. He then joined Associated Newspapers, publisher of *Daily Mail* and *Metro* in UK. As ANL's International Development director, he conceptualised a compact midmarket newspaper for the Indian market and initiated a JV with the India Today Group to launch a new newspaper, *Mail Today*. ■

What is a newspaper?



S. Muthiah

Indeed, what is a newspaper? That's easy; the answer is built into the word. It's a paper – and, by extension, a publication – that carries news. But, then, what is 'news'? Everyone who has done a course in Journalism would have had more than a full dose of hoary explanations of what constitutes 'news'. Like 'dog bites man is not news but when man bites dog it is'. Or, 'information that comes from all directions, North, East, West and South'. Or, 'information that is new'. Or, 'information that will interest the largest number of readers who themselves may have a wide variety of interests'. Are our newspapers today living up to these expectations? To a great extent, they feel they are, and rising circulations and readership would appear to indicate that they are. But those who've long been addicted to newspapers wonder whether they as readers are getting really what they want.

There's a whole heap of them completely put off by these full page advertisements in colour that completely envelope the newspaper and diminish the importance of Page 1 – and the last news page to which many turn to first. It is not that there have not been newspapers in the past whose front page were all advertising. Whether it was *The Times*, London, or *The Hindu*, Madras, their front pages were taken over entirely by advertising. But there's a difference. Today's advertisers who want the front page are selling products that only a small percentage of the readership can afford. Yesterday's front pages mainly comprised personalised advertising – the 'classifieds' – in such great variety that almost every reader was sure to find an advertisement or two offering something that would interest him or her. In fact, many saw these 'smalls' – as some called them – as 'news', offering fresh information on a host of available and affordable items or activities. When such front pages were done away with, Page One was meant to be for all the main news of the day (in reality, the previous day), with some newspapers adding their own voice, the editorial, to it. Page One became the sales pitch of the newspaper and – particularly in the case of street sales – what attracted the reader to the publication. The full-page Page One ads have certainly diminished the value of Page One news – and in the eyes of many, the quality and purpose of the newspaper. Instead of enlightening readers – which is what newspapers are meant to do – they have become vehicles that create aspirations; instead of focussing on needs, they have begun to encourage wants, is the view of many a disappointed, usually an 'old school', reader.

To counter this there came from the 1990s the Samir Jain school of journalism that has made *The Times of India* the leading English language newspaper in the world. He introduced the concept of marketing a newspaper as a commodity. But for a commodity to be successfully marketed, the product has to meet the test of quality. And the quality standards he has set are based on what he thinks the reader wants and not what intellectual editors sitting in ivory towers think the buyers of their papers should read!

Forget the host of supplements his newspapers today bring out. Forget Page 3 journalism (which, mercifully, has not sunk to the 'tits and bums' journalism of the British tabloids that first introduced the page). Forget the focus on design and colour. Forget all the space being offered to organisation, products and events, either unpaid or paid for as advertorials or whatever else they are described as. Almost everyone seems to be doing

(The writer has been in journalism for more than 60 years. He is editor, Madras Musings, author, and a columnist for The Hindu. He has taught journalism and print production at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Anna University and the University of Madras. He helped found India's first degree course in printing technology at Anna University in 1980. He has been an office bearer of the Madras Printers' and Lithographers' Association, and the All Indian Federation of Master Printers.)

it to some degree or other these days. But in his case, besides all these, all he did was what classes in journalism have long taught but found the practitioners of profession seldom following, particularly the higher they get and begin believing they are the kingmakers or opinion-creators. And that was:

No news interests everybody (unless it's a sensational event), so the newspaper should offer the widest range of news, providing something for every class of its reader. That's an impossible task, but by writing brief or tighter editing many more stories could be fitted in, giving the opportunity for greater variety for a wider audience. On the morning just before I sat down to write this piece, I read a column-long story of 16 paragraphs. Only the first seven paragraphs had anything new to say, the rest were all background about the Italian marines case that had been repeated ad nauseam over the previous few days and during earlier reports. And, just for the record, those seven paras could have been edited to five without anything, including background, being lost, making room for two more stories! If only there was tighter editing! There's no dearth of stories, but editing is a lost art.

Another recent example on the failure of many a newspaper to reach out to as many interests as possible was a paper spending much of two pages on a recent India-England T20 *tamasha*, but on the same day giving two paras and on the next four paras to India's hockey team winning two matches in the Asian championships. Surely there are readers who see a world of sport beyond cricket, who still see hockey as India's national game. What all this ads ups is that more stories spread over a wider range of interests is what a newspaper should carry every day – the Samir Jain way – if it is to be worthy of being called a newspaper



Mastheads of some of the popular newspapers in Chennai.

A second early lesson taught in Journalism classes – and by Samir Jain too – is to write simply and with clarity, write so that the language used will reach the lowest common denominator of your readership. There's a sports reporter I'm often forced to read because he goes beyond the world of cricket and he uses almost every multi-syllable word he has come across, often incorrectly. And there are book and film critics and others of their ilk – not to mention editorial writers – who appear to be writing not only just for themselves but also, it would seem, to make what they are writing about become flops. Displays of erudition and perceived superiority, not attempts at enlightenment are what this writing is all about. Much of this happens in news writing too, especially in bylined stories given unnecessary spreads.

And a third early lesson is that readers are far more interested in their immediate area than in the nation, leave alone the world at large. Acres of space are given to Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and other States whereas the concerns of the State of publication, let's say, Tamil Nadu, are given the go by. A few soft stories on the

State, it is often felt, would more than suffice while scores of stories of inaction that affect the average reader are ignored. Forget being a 'national' newspaper, be a local one, where your readers are first! These are just three of the early lessons taught in journalism classes round the world on what make a good newspaper. In reality, most newspaper editors have forgotten these lessons and even after Samir Jain came along and reminded them of the way to go to make newspapers more meaningful – and profitable – the trend continues. Mercifully, the local language papers have long thought differently, though, unfortunately, a couple of the big boys have now begun to follow the traditional English language newspaper route in India, thinking it will gain them greater respectability with the powers-that-be. A newspaper has to decide whether it wants to serve a wide readership or be read by an elite few who stroll in the corridors of power in the country. Too many, sadly, think the second way. Worse, readers targeted by both types of newspapers are losing their way through all the advertising which now begins even before the news. ■

Confronting challenges, mastering change



V.S. Maniam

How is it that some established, and even beloved, journals have had to fold while some others of the same kind seem to be sailing along? I have in mind especially the *Newsweek*, established in 1933 and (once) the second largest circulated news magazine in the United States, which has discontinued its print version and become an entirely digital product. Is this attributable to the advancing digital media, as many think? The inevitable corollary to that view is that the print media is in clear decline. This is a little difficult to accept: how else can one explain the relative stability of the rest? Of *Time*, for instance, which remains the premier news magazine with, reportedly, the world's largest circulation in its category.

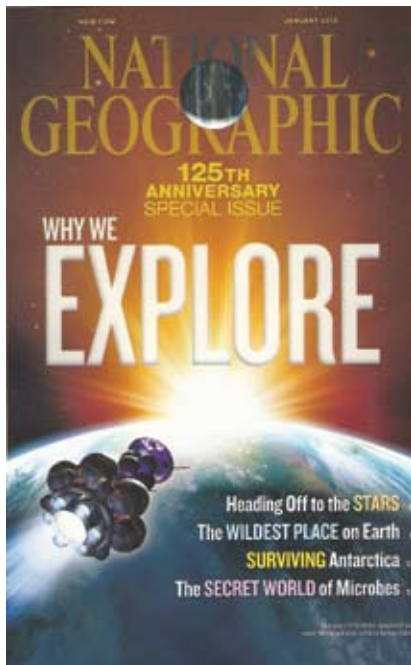
It seems to me that all that digital media has accomplished is to effect instant purveying of news developments even as they occur, often with some analysis and much firsthand accounts and photographs, round the clock and round the week, in what has come to be called the 24/7 news cycle. It is this challenge that the print media, whether weekly journals or daily newspapers, have to contend with. Yet, despite the strength of that challenge, it again seems to me for one that the digital media cannot supplant the print media. Look at the *New York Times*. It remains, amidst the so-called digital revolution, the finest print-newspaper in the world. It has confronted its challenges squarely and, seemingly, vanquished them, to the dismay of its rivals.

'All the news that's fit to print' is the credo of the *New York Times*. The paper has remained true to that credo and in a manner that enables its reader to make sense of all that is happening. Its readers are the kind that seek to be truly informed as well as to be enlightened about the implications of the different pieces of news. The paper satisfies them on both counts, in that sense being loyal to them. And it deals with every aspect of politics, life and the arts, all without any cheapening or coarsening and indeed with a kind of reverence. That is something hardly possible in the instant kind of journalism in the digital media.

Absence of any sort of confusion or dithering over core principles would thus seem to be the first prerequisite for confronting the digital challenge and overcoming it. What this means is that there is no pandering to seemingly changing reader tastes. The newspaper or journal – the survivor amidst the digital media, that is – sets and fashions those tastes, not the other way around. It is not as if there are no changes whatever. There are; and these are often dictated, as is evident in the *New York Times*, by little more than the need to avert monotony. Feature stories change, photographs and graphics increase in number and variety, and even columnists change, but without the slightest alteration or dilution of the paper's essential persona. Indeed, the more it changes in details, the more it remains the same. Its grasp and handling of change is underlined by the fact that it has as gracious a presence in its digital version as in the print version.

(The writer was with *The Statesman* between 1964 and 1993, all but the last four years on its reporting side.

He had started his career in *The Indian Express*, Madras, in 1947 as an apprentice, then had moved into periodicals and returned to mainstream journalism. He has taught journalism at the *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan*, Chennai, and now lives in Princeton, New Jersey, USA.)



Photos: V.S. Maniam

The National Geographic, a journal of exploration, and the New Yorker, a magazine of general interest, have thrived and remained faithful to their intrinsic character.

A firm refusal to be confused by the digital threat would seem to be one more prerequisite for overcoming it. One could say, broadly, that those among the print media that have gone under were seemingly confounded by the consequences of advancing digital technology – loss of readership and advertisement revenue, mainly – into effecting ill-considered alterations often in violation of their intrinsic character. Such as, for instance, a news magazine half-filling its pages with opinion columns.

Two outstanding instances of journals that have steadfastly stubbornly faithful to their intrinsic character without the slightest change, and seem indeed to be thriving in the present hostile milieu, need to be mentioned: the *New Yorker* and the *National Geographic*. The latter remains the journal of exploration par excellence in every conceivable field, as it has always been, but that is no surprise since it is the journal of the National Geographic Society.

What surprises is the unchanging mix of its content: awe-inspiring photographs, painstakingly crafted maps and charts and almost chatty pieces even on the toughest subjects. And the quality of its colour and printing are surely unequalled. A heirloom of a magazine. That could be said also of the *New Yorker*, although it is a magazine of general interest with a different content mix: quality fiction, by established writers and perhaps even more by new ones; non-fiction, long but irresistible pieces, as well as idiosyncratic short ones by the likes of Woody Allen and Steve Martin, and the usual back-of-the-book reviews of the arts, the pages punctuated by superb single-panel cartoons, most of them exceptionally subtle teasers. (In one not long ago, one beribboned general tells another, “No she likes me best!” What do you think the reference was to?) Some cartoons totally fox the reader.

When some years ago the unquestionably talented celebrity editor Tina Brown left and was succeeded by a non-celebrity, there was some questioning whether the *New Yorker* would stay unaffected. It has. Possibly because it has stuck fiercely to its roots and been loyal to its readership – politically informed and Democratic-inclined, above-average in intellect and interests and manifestly with a lively sense of humour. Those readers, in turn, stay loyal to it. It is said that the great bulk of its subscribers – about 85 per cent – keep renewing their subscriptions. That is somewhat unusual.

Time has, admittedly, undergone some style change – its feature stories have, for instance, become fewer – but not at the expense of its essential nature as a news magazine. Could this be the primary reason why it is sailing along? Another journal in the *Time* group, *Fortune*, is one more that has similarly undergone style changes but without affecting its basic look. And it seems to be doing well, too. Incidentally, the one newspaper that has been subject to what was clearly a style overhaul when it came under new management is the *Wall Street Journal*, losing in that process what one media critic called “the literary majesty of its original version”. But to the surprise of many, the paper continues to thrive, staying on top of the rest, in what is an object lesson in mastering change. ■

‘What matters most is credible content’

For the news publishing industry, stagnating revenues and increasing operational costs seem to be the challenges to beat. In a media world “buffeted by the winds of change unleashed by modern technology”, where the tools and modes of news gathering, editing, printing and distribution are changing at an astonishing pace, the best way forward is for print and digital to embrace each other and sail forward, say speakers at the WAN-IFRA India 2012 Conference inaugural. **Sashi Nair** reports

Speaking at the inaugural of the 20th annual WAN-IFRA India conference, WAN-IFRA president and Jacob Mathew cited stagnating revenues and



Jacob Mathew (left) and P.G. Pawar have a chat before the inaugural.

increasing operational costs as two major challenges confronting the news publishing industry. “The media has become a powerful agent of change,” he said, and provided a backdrop in a nutshell:

“In India we have seen new media tools being used effectively for mobilising people against corruption, against displacement in the name of development and for anti-nuclear agitations. The media world is buffeted by the winds of change unleashed by modern technology. Tools and modes of news gathering, editing, printing and distribution are changing at an astonishing pace. The print media has come under tremendous pressure all over.”

Referring to decreasing newspaper ad revenues, Mathew said advertising income coupled with inadequate income from circulation made the present business model unsuitable in the new age. “While newspapers have grown by 5 per cent thanks largely to the new launches, readership in the 25-year-old age group is almost stagnant. More than 600 million in India are under 35 years of age and to many of them newspapers may not be



Pichai Cheunsuksawadi stresses that the best way forward is for print and digital to coexist.

Photos: WAN-IFRA



Delegates to the WAN-IFRA India Conference found it a useful opportunity to meet and share ideas. The conference comprised three sessions that ran for the most in parallel: the Newsroom Summit, the Printing Summit, and the Crossmedia Advertising Summit.

the preferred media. Increasing newsprint prices is a major concern; the appreciation of the US dollar has added to our worries as newspapers consume large quantities of imported newsprint. The newspaper industry provides employment to more than 75000 employees, numerous newspaper vendors. The (Majitha) Wage Board recommendations will force many newspapers to close down. Newspapers provide multiplicity of views and with the closure of each newspaper an important voice falls silent," he said.

Mathew also mentioned how paid news was undermining unbiased journalism. One way to overcome it, he said, was to ensure good financial health for the newspaper industry. "We need to use the opportunities thrown up by new media... mobile phones which along with digital devices are becoming cheaper... time has come for us to deliver content through these devices as well. We should also pay attention to create and disseminate video content. To survive in the digital era we must adapt to new tools and re-mould our organisational and newsroom structure for the future." Mathew was not for surrendering the initiative to corporate groups and new players "who are keen to give away such devices to cream off our revenue" in the 3G era. "Entities like Google pose a challenge, so we must ensure that freeloaders

pay for the content they take from us. Good, credible content will always have its place. There is an increasing trend and willingness to pay for quality content. We must find ways to monetise the use of our content. The future belongs to those who embrace new ideas, innovations. What matters most is credible content. Good stories and good storytelling will never go out of fashion. In the communications business we are selling credibility... we have a promising future but we need to get it right," he explained.

Echoing Mathew, Pichai Cheunsuksawadi, editor-in-chief, *Bangkok Post*, said that the best way forward was for print and digital to coexist and embrace each other. "Newspapers still booming in the Asia-Pacific region, and the prospects will be enhanced further more in the coming 3-5 years when the ASEAN economic community will be formed and enhance integration. ASEAN now has free trade agreements with India, China, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The six in November will begin talks about economic cooperation and India and China could begin trading. The global economy will affect our business; it forces us to look at our businesses; it's inevitable. We are dealing with a generational shift – Asia-Pacific has the largest Internet access," said Cheunsuksawadi, pointing to

the rapid growth of the Internet in India and China and the growth of mobile phones worldwide. He had no doubt that for newspapers, it was a long, arduous and difficult period of change. He took the audience through the *Bangkok Post's* journey of change – from 2001 when there was only one newspaper, to today when there are three newspapers and magazines, there is satellite television, video, news programming, Twitter, e-connectivity, e-paper, apps, iPads... However, one thing the group had decided was that the newspaper "would remain the heart and soul of what we do". The digital environment had changed so much... infrastructure, technology was a big challenge. We wanted middle management to speak, to come up with ideas."

Earlier, welcoming the delegates to what he called the Knowledge City, P.G. Pawar, chairman, Sakal Media Group, said the newspaper business was shifting towards Asia – towards India and China. "There's competition and technology coming in, this is the right place to discuss matters, see the progress and talk about the future," he said. ■

'We have to go back to the reader'

The closing keynote address by Arun Anant, CEO, *The Hindu*, almost had a poignant touch to it. Looking at the "new prism" to try and find out what the future of news publishing would be like, Anant had more questions than answers. "At the end of two days we are left with the same question. Am not an astrologer...if I knew the future of news publishing I would be in an island in the Mediterranean, not talking to you here. So whatever I tell you about the future of news publishing don't take me seriously," he started off.

Anant did not dwell too much on what he felt had been heard often: if you are a newspaper man don't be held ransom to print... there are many other delivery vehicles and people are open to receiving news at



Photo: WAN-IFRA

Arun Anant offering the audience food for thought.

all times. "Sometimes I feel the flavour of the season changes more often than the news we read nowadays. Everyone got excited with the long tail of revenues from the Internet. Nobody talked about the long head of costs that were unmonetisable," he said.

Looking at the prism as reader and consumer, Anant wondered whether, if the hawker did not slide the newspaper under the front door, people would miss the paper. "Probably for a few days. And then I'll learn to live without it. Newspapers are still popular in India because there is a vibrant hawker system," he said, what he termed as "transactional loyalty" rather than an emotional one. "Newspapers are read because they are accessible, affordable and available. And the recycle value is often higher than the cover price." He saw the critical problem being people

having less time in the morning to read a newspaper. "Good quality editorial can help in more time being spent on the paper. Unfortunately, the metric on time spent in the Indian Readership Survey is not available, and until that changes we will be left with suboptimal solutions that may not be relevant for reader or advertiser," he added.

Anant rounded off with some "fundamental questions": should we stop covering politics, or do we have to find a different language and style while covering it...should the morning newspaper become an opinion paper... should the morning paper be a trigger for a day full of hope (rather than what it is today) what should the Web site of a news house carry... what makes social media successful... people who forward stories to make a statement of who they are, how does it impact news gathering... should stories be news-based or human-interest-based... when a reader forwards a story he becomes an editor, when a reader writes his own blog he becomes a journalist... so why should anyone listen to somebody else's prioritisation... but without accountability there is no credibility... what this all means is that we have to go back to the reader... not to the ad sales person, not to the journalist, not to the advertiser. ■

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TRENDS TO WATCH OUT FOR

'If readers don't trust us, we don't have a chance'

At the Newsroom Summit at the WAN-IFRA Conference 2012 in Pune, Eric Bjerager, president, World Editors Forum, Denmark, spoke about 17 trends to watch out for in journalism. While stressing that the forum aimed to work for press freedom, editorial excellence and quality journalism, he quoted Mahatma Gandhi: ...man should understand the dignity of labour, and his work should be such that it advances interest in the community to which he belongs. "This is the heart of our profession," Bjerager said. **Sashi Nair** highlights the main points of his speech

Bjerager's 17 top trends that could apply to most newspaper businesses:

1. **Newsrooms are increasingly outsourced.** This includes editorial functions considered journalism's core. Australia's Fairfax has moved subbing operations to New Zealand, as has several British newspapers (to Australia). Editors are looking for faster and flexible freelancers, journalists are finding it more effective to work in teams and make concerted efforts.

2. **Two-speed journalism is now a reality.** Yes, social networks matter; to be first is no longer as important as to be relevant.

3. **Long-form journalism is now on the rise.** It is making a comeback (the success of The Caravan is an



Erik Bjerager addressing the audience.

example in India) and people are using iPads and mobile phones to access long-form journalism.

4. **Newsrooms come in many organisational models.** The change has been faster in the past ten years than the previous 90 years combined. Keeping up with the pace of change is a huge challenge for editors all over the world. Newsrooms are organised in a variety of ways, there is no one single form as such. The creators report stories, the curators select, decide and produce the stories for every platform, and the team ensures that news reaches as many people as possible via social media. The challenge is to get readers interested in stories.

5. **Breaking news is digital.**

News lives on the Internet, on Twitter, on Facebook; breaking news on Twitter is faster than what radio or television can do. It makes the TV station look antiquated, but yes, speed prevails over accuracy.

6. **Data journalism is accepted as a discipline.** People are increasingly getting interested in analysing data.

7. **Infographics dominate the web.** From pictures to maps and illustrations, there's an explosion of infographics on the web and that is driving the change in newspapers

8. **Barriers between print and broadcast are shrinking.** Multimedia journalism is becoming the rule. However, it remains to be seen whether videos

Photo: WAN-IFRA

produced by newspapers and print journalists will dominate the living rooms in the future.

9. Video is becoming a social affair. High-quality videos, live streaming of debates are attracting more people online. They are invited to give comments, expert comments are also invited via Skype, live, and thus, there is great interactivity.

10. There is more momentum from mobile. You can reach your audiences no matter where they are. The challenge is of course to make the investment in the mobile platform viable.

11. Social media enriches journalism. But there are many questions such as should the reporter use social media merely as a tool for research. And there are no easy answers.

12. Social media talent will invigorate our editorial staff. A new team (breed) of reporters and editors are entering our newsrooms, using Twitter and Facebook. It helps you know where to move.

13. Digital training is a necessity. Digital journalism is constantly developing; tools and methods are changing every day. Today's reporters have only a fraction of the skills needed to survive in the modern newsroom. Digital storytelling is a must to survive in the long-run.

14. Reporters are better curators than bloggers or aggregators. As the world gets bigger, people need more curation (selecting and summarising content, adding value). Newspaper reporters are good curators, they have professional insight and access to the right sources. We need curation to be aggregators.

15. Journalism must be found. Headlines and lead paragraphs must be optimised for search engines. Finding a relevant article has become as important as writing a story.

16. All-round newspapers are challenged online by big tabloids. The *Daily Mail* has become the most visited news site; it focuses on tabloid journalism. Indeed, the classic newspaper struggles for advertising.

17. Ethics is all about going back to the basics. We must

ensure readers trust us, we live on trust, this is our main asset, if our readers don't trust us we don't have a chance to survive. We must constantly remind ourselves that getting the story right is important ■

Resource kit for fair gender portrayal

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has launched a new resource to promote gender-ethical journalism. The Learning Resource Kit for Gender-Ethical Journalism and Media House Policy is the outcome of a project launched in July 2011 to promote fair gender portrayal within media houses and the journalistic profession. The kit draws from the insights of media practitioners, educators and communication researchers from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, North America and Pacific. It brings together practical guidelines to enhance women's representation in media content and encourage dialogue within media structures and self-regulatory bodies together with civil society groups.

The editors note that "portraying gender in a fair and ethical manner will only occur when it becomes a concern for everyone in the newsroom and beyond. Journalists, photographers, news editors, camerawomen and cameramen, cartoonists, media employers, self-regulatory bodies, journalists' schools, associations and unions, all have a role to play in ensuring that media become an effective mirror of society. Civil society actors can support this process through monitoring, dialogue and positive partnerships with media".

The kit is organised in two books. Book 1 concentrates on conceptual issues about gender in news reporting. Book 2 presents gender-ethical thematic guidelines on reporting climate change, disaster, economic news, sexual and reproductive health, human trafficking, peace and security, politics, and sexual violence. The 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project revealed a global average of barely one woman in every four people was seen, heard or read about in news stories. This is an improvement from 15 years ago when it was less than one in five. However, the pace is slow. The kit is available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish may be downloaded free of charge at www.whomakesthenews.org and www.ifj.org. ■

Make the rapist pay



A.J. Philip

Dear Justice Verma,
This is the second time I am writing a letter to you. The first was soon after you retired as Chief Justice of India in early 1998. On our request, you had written an article for the *Indian Express*, where I was in charge of the editorial page. A cheque was sent to you from the accounts department along with a voucher full of cryptic abbreviations that made it look like some version of the Da Vinci Code. You could make neither head nor tail of the payment and you sent the cheque back to us with a question mark. It was my job to send you a revalidated cheque with an explanatory letter and you were gracious enough to accept the payment, though you refused to write a regular column for us.

It is a measure of the confidence the people have in you that the government has appointed you to head the three-member committee to suggest legal steps to counter the growing threat of rape women face in this country. Former Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court Justice Leila Seth and former Solicitor General Gopal Subramaniam, who are your co-members, are persons of exceptional personal integrity and legal acumen. As a citizen, I trust your collective ability to come up with some practical suggestions.

Cynical governments have in the past appointed judges like you, more to control situations from going out of control than to seek solutions to problems. The Sri Krishna Commission, which went into the Mumbai riots, is a case in point. This time I give the government the benefit of the doubt because your brief is limited and you have been given just a month to complete your work. Neither the economy, nor the population has grown at the rate at which incidents of rape have increased – a whopping 740 per cent since 1953, when statistics on the subject began to be tabulated by the National Crime Records Bureau.

To be frank, there would have been no need to give you this task when you could have been enjoying your post-retirement life, if the government had cared to read and implement the recommendations of at least four Law Commissions on strengthening the anti-rape laws. Before I come to the subject, let me request you to revisit the law (Section 228A of the IPC) that prevents the media from revealing the identity of the 23-year-old girl, who was gang-raped on December 16 and who died in Singapore on December 29. The law should be valid only in rape cases, not in rape and murder cases.

The death of the girl has transformed the rape case; the main charge the six rapists, including the so-called juvenile, face is murder. The tragedy apart, any person would love to have such a girl as his daughter or sister. She was so good in her studies that her father sold his property to pay her fees, which came to Rs 1.80 lakh. As reports suggest, she was a role model for the youth in her locality, who would find the light switched on in her one-room house in New Delhi late into the night, as she was busy studying. Now that she is no more, why should the government threaten the media of action if her name is revealed?

In the absence of a real name, the *Times of India* called her Nirbhay (Fearless) and *Outlook* christened her Jagruti (Awakened). Let me call her Jyoti (Light), which also fits her well. Few people have noticed that she

(Courtesy: Indian Currents; reproduced here with the permission of the writer who is a senior journalist based in New Delhi, a member of the Assessment and Monitoring Authority of the Planning Commission, and president of non-profit organisation Deepalaya.)

was an extraordinarily brave girl, who risked her life in protecting her friend. I have heard some people ask why she was with that boy at that time. She was betrothed to him and they were to marry in February next. They had gone to watch the movie *Life of Pi* at a mall in Saket (6 pm show) and were returning home on a bus.

You would have noticed Union Minister Shashi Tharoor's suggestion that the new anti-rape law should be named after the brave girl. The government's response has been disheartening, to say the least. It says it is an American practice to name a bill after the Congressman who moved it and no provision in the Indian Penal Code can be named after an individual. Lawmakers have to be creative and they should not behave like prisoners of tradition. The heavens will not fall if the new bill you are supposed to propose says after the brief introduction, "hereinafter called Jyoti law". There are some precedents for it.

Even those who have only a modicum of knowledge of law have heard about the Sarda Act. I do not have to tell you that the Act refers to the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, passed by the British India Legislature on September 28, 1929. It fixed the age of marriage for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years. It is known by the name of its sponsor, Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarda. In 1997, the Supreme Court had issued certain guidelines to be followed by every organisation employing women to deal with the problem of "sexual harassment at the workplace". It is popularly known as Vishakha Guidelines. Given these examples, it should be possible for you to creatively name the new law after Jyoti, for which all those who were saddened by her death and protested against it in various ways would be eternally grateful to you.

First and foremost, you should redefine rape, which the dictionary

defines as "the ravishing or the violation of a woman". But the definition of rape, as in Section 375 of IPC, still stresses on 'penetration'. Though judicial verdicts have modified the Victorian-era law of 1860 to treat a girl as "raped" even if her hymen was intact, provided there was a penis-vagina contact, we have not moved forward on this issue. I do not have to tell you that rape is committed not for sexual gratification alone but to humiliate a person or an entire community represented by her. Thus rape needs to be redefined. Violation or ravishing of a girl can happen even when she is just inappropriately touched. If the intention is to sexually humiliate or shame her, it should be treated as rape. In fact, there is a strong case for grading of rapes and fixing appropriate and graded punishments. Touching, groping, etc in buses, cinema theatres and other public places without the intention of sexual intercourse should be treated as a minor form of rape and a rigorous imprisonment of five years should be fixed.

Attempt to rape in secluded places, which could have led to forced sex, should be treated separately and a punishment of 10 years' rigorous imprisonment would be ideal. If it is a gang rape attempt, every gangster should get 15 years of rigorous imprisonment. In case a man has forced sex with a girl, the punishment should be 20 years of RI. If it is a gang rape, the punishment should go up to 25 years of RI for each member. If the girl dies because of rape or she is killed, the punishment should be imprisonment till death. If you feel that death penalty is warranted in rape-cum-murder cases, it is fine, though I am personally against capital punishment. In all these cases, if the accused is a uniformed person or an employee of the government, five extra years of imprisonment should be awarded. Similarly, if the victim is a minor, five extra years of imprisonment

should be added to the quantum of punishment.

There are now special courts to hear cases related to environment, service matters, labour issues, etc. Why not have special courts to hear women-related cases in all the districts? I believe that it is the certainty of punishment, rather than the severity of it, which deters crime. Given this truth, it is a must that hearing of rape cases should be quick. Ideally, the police should file a case within three months of the occurrence of rape; the court should complete the hearing in three months; the higher court should dispose of the appeal in the next three months; and the guilty punished in the fourth quarter.

There should be only one appeal in rape cases. In the Delhi gang-rape case, the police were able to file the chargesheet in a special court within three weeks. As I write this, I have on my table the newspapers carrying reports about capital punishment awarded to the man who raped and killed 15-year-old Arya on March 6, 2012, in her own house in Kerala. I am really impressed by the quick delivery of justice by Thiruvananthapuram district special judge B. Sudheendra Kumar. However, it is now four years since a Catholic nun was raped in Odisha's Kandhamal District. I still remember the dingy area, under the staircase, where the heinous act was committed. When I visited the spot, all I could do was pray for justice.

In rape cases, 'in-camera' trial is now the norm. It should be made mandatory and no crowding of the court should be allowed. No questions about the character of the girl should be allowed, for even a sex worker needs to be protected from rape. Only one defence lawyer -- not a battery of them -- should be allowed in the court to prevent the victim from being intimidated. Judges should be sensitized about women's rights and their needs for privacy.

A rapist is a shameless character. He won't be shamed by arrest and imprisonment. He should, therefore, be made to pay for his shameful conduct. I suggest that any person convicted of rape should be forced to share his property with the girl whom he has raped. His property should be divided equally among his children and the raped person. If, for instance, he has 10 acres of land and two children and a wife, the victim should get 2.5 acres of land as her share. Provision should be made to ensure that her share is given immediately after the conviction.

If the rapist is an employee of a company or government, the victim should also have a claim on his provident fund/gratuity and it should be settled immediately after the conviction. Given the attachment Indians have for property, such a provision will be a great deterrent against forcibly laying hands on any other organ on a woman. I am personally against castration as a punishment but I have a suggestion in this regard. Though plea bargain -- an agreement in a criminal case between the prosecutor and the defendant whereby the defendant agrees to plead guilty to a particular charge in return for some concession from the prosecutor -- is generally not allowed in Indian courts, a convicted rapist who has completed half his jail term should be released if he willingly undergoes medically certified chemical castration. This is allowed in some states in the US.

Since time is of the essence in rape cases and people are still upset over the Delhi incident, I can only hope that the government will incorporate all your suggestions in a new anti-rape Bill. We often claim that women are worshipped in the country by invoking the names of goddesses like Lakshmi and Durga. All that the Indian girl expects is gender equality and the right to live a dignified

life, free from sexual harassment. They all look forward to reading your report and seeing how the government responds to it.

As I conclude, let me wish you and your colleagues a very happy and prosperous New Year. May you three be God's instrument to erase the gang-rape blot on the country's image and to usher in

a new system, which will ensure that a rapist is punished certainly, quickly and severely and every girl in India can truly feel, to quote Tagore, that her "mind is without fear and the head is held high". ■

Yours sincerely

A.J. Philip

World Press Trends 2012 now available

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) has published the 2012 edition of World Press Trends, its annual report on the state of the global newspaper industry. At the same time, it introduced a new era for World Press Trends with the launch of a user-friendly database for those who need additional data and the flexible functions that a database provides. The data shows:

- 2.5 billion people read a newspaper in print regularly
- Newspaper circulation grew by 1.1 per cent globally last year, to 512 million copies, and 4.2 per cent between 2007 and 2011. The growing newspaper business in Asia has more than offset circulation losses elsewhere in the world
- While digital platforms are helping newspapers increase their audiences, they are as yet not proving to be a sufficient source of revenue

World Press Trends 2012, available free to WAN-IFRA members and for sale to non-members, is a new, more concise version than in previous years, yet contains most of the pertinent data on trends in the industry. The report includes an overview of circulation, advertising, digital and other worldwide trends, regional perspectives from leading publishers and data from 75 countries in comparative table format. Full details about the report can be found at www.wan-ifra.org/wpt_report_2012. ■

Free Press Journal, Outlook tie up for content

The *Free Press Journal* newspaper and the Outlook Group have announced a collaboration under which the newspaper will carry select stories from the magazines -- *Outlook Business* and *Outlook Money* -- on the business pages of the *Free Press Journal*. The collaboration will help the latter expand its coverage, and also ensure that *Outlook Business* and *Outlook Money* reach a wider target audience in Mumbai. The *Free Press Journal* will carry stories from the Outlook Group magazines on business pages every Friday. ■

Mindsets in the media



Sakuntala Narasimhan

(The writer, based in Bangalore, gave up a job with the Times of India Group in Mumbai to write her columns, acquire two PhDs and become an activist for consumer rights. She is a recipient of the Media Foundation's Chameli Devi Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist of the Year (1983), the K.S. Aiyar Memorial award for Outstanding Writing on Socially Relevant Issues, the PUCL National Award for Human Rights Journalism, and the Deepalaya National Award for Child Rights Journalism. Her fortnightly columns on gender issues and consumer rights ran in the Deccan Herald for 27 years.)

All through December 2012, the top spot in the media went to reports on the rape of a 23-year-old girl on a moving bus in Delhi. Covering the massive demonstrations held all over the country demanding action and assurances of safety for women, the reports said it was the largest protest demonstration the capital had seen in over two decades. Even the infamous Mathura rape case which resulted in amendments to the rape law during the 1980s, did not draw such spontaneous indignation and anger, especially from youngsters including college students (male as well as female). Examine the media reports carefully, and you can detect some curious undercurrents of sexist perspectives. Rape has nothing to do with “immodest or provocative dress” or women being out after dark, or going to a pub, most arguments concede. But why then do we have reports saying that the girl was out “with a male friend”? The two of them had gone to a movie around 6 pm and were returning after 9 pm.

So, the unarticulated question is: What was she doing out after dark, with a “male friend”? Does that somehow justify the attack on her? No, of course not, the media persons covering the incident will aver. As a media person – and a feminist – I am wondering whether the fact of her having been in the company of a “male” friend was (or is) germane. Explore the alternatives – she could have been out alone, on her own. Would that have been more ‘acceptable’? Or she could have been out with a ‘female’ friend. Would that have been better, in terms of safety or ‘acceptability’? Would they have been both vulnerable to attack? So what does that leave us with – the alternative that she ought to have stayed indoors, as a “good girl”? Or gone out only with the ‘protection’ of a brother or father? Isn’t that what the Taliban insist on?

In the wake of the Mathura rape case, the law was amended to say that the victim’s sexual history cannot be brought into the investigations. Earlier, it used to be common for the defence counsel to allege during arguments in court, that the girl was of “immoral character” and therefore “invited the sexual assault” on her. The amendment came on the basis of a public outcry by activists and lawyers who declared that having a boy friend (or a relationship) does not mean she deserves rape. Also, a male friend does not mean automatically a sexual relationship; a female can be friends with a male colleague with whom she shares interests, just as she can be friends with female colleagues. Was the media looking for a ‘masala’ angle while referring to the fact that the victim was returning from a movie with a “male friend”?

Three decades after the amendment to the rape law, we see a spate of rape reports, from around the country (Guwahati, Mangalore, Bangalore, Patna, and now Delhi, to name just a few that hit the headlines in recent weeks) that make snide references to the victim having been attacked while emerging from a bar (Guwahati), or a “rave party” (Mangalore) – the reference implying that somehow what she was up to was “not



Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

proper", unwomanly, contrary to acceptable norms of 'female behaviour'. Does it matter where she was emerging from, whether she was partying or patronising a bar? Does that justify sexual violence? When it is acceptable for females to be working night shifts at call centres, pilot aircraft at all hours and do duty at emergency wards in super-speciality hospitals round the clock, why is it that when it comes to being attacked in the most brutal manifestation of physical violence and violation of a human body, factors like her having been with a male friend or part of a group celebrating at a bar, who she was with – and where, and when – become relevant?

Rapes occur in daylight too. Minor girls left alone at home while the mother goes to work, have been raped. Ordinary urban middle-class housewives, home alone during the day, have been attacked by intruders who rob, rape and finally murder to prevent the possibility of being identified by the victim in a police parade. So are media persons being not sensitive enough when they include details about the male friend or the late hour or the beer party?

Here is another example – a woman scientist who was interviewed for a magazine about gender issues in professional advancement in India, mentioned

that she, being the only woman in a faculty of nine male colleagues, often missed out on professional discussions because the men adjourn for beer after work and exchange updates about grants, proposals, funding, etc because the men disapprove of taking a woman along when they go out for a beer, and stay till dinnertime. It is not the beer that attracts her, it is the discussions that take place (over a glass of beer) which are just as important for her work and her professional advancement as it is for the men. And yet, when the interview was published, it read as if she wanted to go on beer drinking sprees with male colleagues. (And tut, tut, good

girls don't do that, right? Not in our culture.) You can be an award-winning scientist, but you still have to prove your 'purity' in terms of being tradition-bound according to "Indian cultural values". You cannot participate in shop talk and discussions if the males prefer to do it over beer.

There was a time when news reports on Indira Gandhi mentioned her being clad in a "brown-and-black Ikat sari" – how was it relevant? Do reports on a male prime minister take note of the colour of his shirt or kurta? The practice of taking note of a woman's dress is less prevalent today, but the deep-seated conservative perspectives about "proper female behaviour" still show up, in media descriptions that are not needed for the veracity of the report.

In its frenzy to be as detailed as possible (to beat the competition) media representatives dig for bits, anything at all, forgetting that judicious decisions on what to leave out, also constitute good reporting. The phrase 'members of a certain minority community' is what is used today, to avoid communal angles. In the context of gender, however, such an approach is still missing, in checking whether a detail is necessary and important, or unnecessary (and even harmful).

The president of the All India Democratic Women's Association, commenting on the Delhi incident, has declared that "commodification" of everything including women, caused by market forces, is part of the reason for the rise in rape cases. Commodification of the female is also cited as one of the reasons for the persistence of cases of dowry harassment, reveals an in-depth study undertaken by Vimochana, a leading group of activists in Bangalore that has been working for gender equity for more than three decades (the bride is seen as a source of funds for upward

mobility for the groom's family). And the media is complicit in this commodification, often through ads but at times even through editorial matter.

I have with me a half-page feature (on clothes) titled, 'Get those wolf whistles'. A sub-heading refers to 'skin tight jeans'. While the decision to wear tight jeans or other attire is entirely the wearer's, why is getting wolf whistles glorified as something to aim for? A random check with females aged between 19 and 39 (including college students, working women and professionals) in December 2012 in Bangalore (and via email from around the country) showed that the majority (87 per cent) did not in fact relish getting wolf whistles. "I dress for comfort, not to attract male attention," said one interviewee, while another mentioned the popular film song of yesteryear, *Tu cheez badi hai mast mast* which commodifies women in quite unambiguous lyrics. A 76-year-old grandmother recalls how her five-year-old grandson sang that song to her, as a compliment, without even understanding the meaning! "What do you expect, if the media – including advertisements and films – it portray women in such terms?" the respondents argued.

You let out a wolf whistle, then sing about the female being a "*mast cheez*" and the next step is to molest, or worse – all for pleasure.

Commodification of everything, including the media, is the issue. A report by two anchors about the hoax call from Australia, enquiring about the health of Kate Middleton, daughter-in-law of Prince Charles, is an example – expressing indignation over the "joke", advertisers have reportedly pulled out of the show, which means loss of revenue for the programme. Advertisers can be big bullies, true. Nothing drives media decisions so much as revenue considerations – in the issue of *Deccan Herald* dated 27 December,

the top story on the front page is about the victim of the Delhi rape incident being flown to Singapore for treatment. Immediately below the headline, on the same front page, is a prominent ad focusing on a picture of a woman's torso in tight, hip-hugging jeans and a tiny top, with generous expanses of her midriff and bellybutton exposed provocatively. A woman's body ravished, causing national outrage, and adjacent to that report a woman's body placed at the centre of the page for the sake of advertising revenue – need one say more?

Does the media's role stop with carrying a lead editorial condemning the rape and asking for legislation for the protection for women, or does it extend to taking a stand on non-editorial content and page layout also? I have known editors who have on principle refused to carry certain advertisements and garnered respect as "good editors". Are they becoming a minority today, in the face of market forces that evaluate everything from a commercial angle and profits? In that case, should we be surprised when cases like the one in Delhi hit the headlines? Once upon a time, when I was a schoolgirl, the popular Tamil magazine *Ananda Vikatan* used to be very readable, with no sleazy pictures or news items. Today, the issues are full of 'hot' photos of 'rising stars' of the screen, showing generous portions of their bodies, alongside gossip items about them in slang language that one would certainly not have found in the issues of *Ananda Vikatan* 30 years ago. There were other magazines, if that was what you were looking for.

Which brings us to the controversial issue of the influence of the media on readers/ viewers. Do provocative ads and visuals impinge on the subconscious perceptions and proclivities of people? The answer lies in two further questions – one, if ads

were not influencing behaviour, why would advertisers shell out money on inserting ads? And that behaviour is not confined to buying decisions for products, it extends to a gamut of lifestyle decisions and goals fashioned around a specific consumerist culture. As for the second, remember the tragedy of a boy who tried to imitate Superman by jumping out of a window (a disclaimer is now run on a strip on TV, warning against trying to duplicate the stunts in the ads, but a three-year-old who watches the disclaimer ads avidly cannot read, and is not mature enough to understand the difference between fantasy and reality)? "It can be done, it is OK to do this," is what the message and visuals say.

Take that further, and the message from item numbers, film sequences with bum-swinging gyrations and man-chasing-woman, males raising wolf whistles as a girl with a fair face walks past, is that replication of such behaviour in real life is OK, acceptable. Glorification of violence on television has been held responsible for the rise of violent tendencies among young viewers (bang-bang, you're dead), similarly the commodification of the female body that films resort to, in item numbers to boost collections at the till, are part of the media's complicity in the kind of attacks that we see on females.

Media comments on curbing the freedom of expression by monitoring the Internet and emails do not take note of a similar – subtle, yet highly effective – curbing of content through the 'commercial pressures' that ads, sponsorships and the pursuit of TRP ratings exert. On the profits vs public good face-off, no prizes for guessing which side wins. ■

REMEMBERING RAMGOPALJI MAHESHWARI

A life dedicated to social service, ethical journalism

November 20 was the birth centenary of Ramgopalji Maheshwari, freedom fighter, committed social worker and a person who championed the cause of Hindi. Born in Mandolai near Jaipur on November 20, 1911, his workspots centred around Nagpur, then the capital of the Central Provinces, and Berar, now known as the Vidharbha region. It was Mahatma Gandhi's ashram, Sewagram, near Nagpur, which inspired Ramgopalji to become a Gandhian and associate himself with the Freedom Movement.

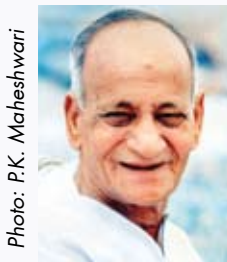


Photo: P.K. Maheshwari

Ramgopalji Maheshwari, or Babuji as he was popularly known.

Throughout his life, Ramgopalji, popularly known as Babuji, wore khadi and believed in simple living. At 18, he chose social service as his goal and Gandhiji's close disciple Krishnadas Jajoo's inspiration led him to be linked to Maheshwari, the mouthpiece of the Maheshwari Samaj, when he turned 22 years. He edited and published the mouthpiece of Maheshwari community with dedication. It was the beginning of his career in journalism, one that continued till the end of his life. Along with the publication of *Maheshwari*, Babuji also took the responsibility of a biweekly publication, *Nava Rajasthan*, started by Brajlal Biyani in Akola.

On February 8, 1934, Vasant Panchami, Babuji started the biweekly *Nava Bharat* from Nagpur which soon became a daily. *Nava Bharat* soon launched editions in Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior, Satna, Chhindwara, Raipur, Bilaspur, Bombay, Nasik and Pune. For 65 years, Ramgopalji, as chief editor, successfully directed the publication of *Nava Bharat*. He was known as the *Bhishma Pitamaha* of journalism in central and western India. Babuji made the *Nava Bharat* a medium to espouse India's Freedom Movement, evidenced by the tricolour held by a *satyagrahi* that appears on the newspaper's masthead. During the struggle for freedom, Babuji was subject to house arrest in 1939. The British demanded a written guarantee from him. However, he did not give up and the newspaper played a vital role in the freedom struggle.

During the Quit India Movement and the "do or die" call from Gandhiji in August 1942, the British rulers imprisoned Babuji in the Nagpur Central Jail on the orders of Governor Sir Twainam. When in jail, Babuji provided necessary financial help to the freedom fighters and also proved to be an effective medium of communication amongst them. In 1955, during Congress convention in Nagpur, he edited the souvenir. His contribution to ethical journalism made him an institution.

Babuji also took upon himself the onus of eradicating conservative customs followed by the Maheshwari Samaj. He solemnised his marriage in a progressive way, which was resented by his father who did not attend it. Babuji's wife Kaushalya Devi provided him necessary support and encouragement in whatever he did and played an important role in women's emancipation. She worked against the veil custom for women and the harsh rituals at the time of death. ■

Who is responsible for violence?



U. Vasuki

The horrendous rape incident on a moving bus in Delhi and the subsequent death of the brave girl awakened the anger of the society which was already at boiling point. The media highlighted both the incident and the societal response to it appropriately. It is notable that the name of the victim was withheld till the end. For the first time, violence against women was discussed in National Development Council meeting. It has taken 65 years for the ruling classes to understand that women's development is part of national development and that violence becomes an impediment to women's development. The rape of the 23-year-old para-medical student was the 635th rape in Delhi last year. In the last ten years, India has been witnessing 20000 registered rapes per year. How many thousands go unregistered, we do not know.

In a study done by UNDP on gender inequalities in 187 countries, India stands at 134. *The Guardian* has stated that among the G-20 countries, India is the worst place for women to live. This is the truth and the painful reality. The reasons are plenty and the solution has to be multi-dimensional with a multi-pronged approach. But we hear a chorus of voices from elected representatives, religious heads and high profile persons that women's dress and their behaviour invite violence. In a knee-jerk reaction, the Pondicherry Government announced that girl students have to wear an overcoat on top of the uniform.

In my experience as an activist, I have personally taken up many cases of sexual violence and our organisation is taking up atleast one lakh cases of different types of violence on an average per year throughout the country. In not a single incident, the victim's dress was "provocative". Children are being abused and even elderly women are not spared and what is the dress they wear? The tribal women of Vachathi and Chinnampathy were raped by police and government officials and can we say that their attire was the reason? Even if it is so, is that a licence for all and sundry to violate women? Is that an open invitation for rape?

Why did she go to that place, why did she go with a male friend, why is she travelling late in the night? These are some of the questions often raised. For women like me who is in an organisation, lots of travelling at all kinds of odd hours is part of life. What about women who go to the cities for work and take the last bus to reach home? What if somebody feels like going to a cinema with a male friend? Is it illegal? Is it a sin? Do we deserve gang rape as a punishment? Are we not living in modern India in the 21st Century?

When the entry of girls and women at public spaces is increasing, it is the responsibility of the government and the society to make the public space safe. Instead, trying to remove women from the public sphere by imposing curfew and restricting their mobility is utterly mindless. Can we suggest a single dress which is rape resistant? Or a single place which is absolutely free from sexual violence? The discussion and debate must be taken away from this off-beaten path. Start accusing the culprits. Do not justify their acts by blaming the victims. Tell the men that they have to

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All India Democratic Women's
Association.)*

behave properly even in the dark, even in a crowded metro and bus, even when they see a woman at a vulnerable position.

The existing laws must be implemented strictly. The accountability of police has to be fixed and penal action has to be taken for dereliction of duty and non-implementation of Standard Operating Procedure. Fast track courts and time-bound trial is the need of the hour. Those who are accused of aggravated sexual assault such as gang rape, custodial rape, child rape, rape by army and defense forces, rapes during communal violence and other conflicts, must be given life sentence without remission. Pending legislations like the sexual assault bill and the sexual harassment at work place bill must be passed. Sure and stringent punishment will certainly bring down the offences.

Law comes only after the offence is committed. What about the mindset and the factors which shape our mind to be inhuman? The patriarchal notions coupled with market ideology which breeds consumerism and the quest for super profits at the cost of inclusive development are to be challenged. In the process of bringing up children, we should inculcate values of equality. School curriculum must have this orientation, not just a chapter on women's rights.

Media's role is very crucial. Every media house must have a gender policy just like they have editorial policy. More self-regulation must come into operation. Advertisements must be screened with gender filter. Paid news portraying criminals in a good light should be done away with. Statutory warning should appear during scenes showing sexual violence.

The centuries-old subordinate status of women which is justified under various covers like religion, ritual, tradition

etc. must be changed. Women must be respected as equal citizens of the country and as co-sculptors in shaping society. Most importantly, the community must intervene. When culprits know for sure that the people around them will catch them and thrash them, it will instill a fear in them. I'm not suggesting that the public

must take law into their hands. But they can intervene and they can prevent. It has happened and it is happening. Some are doing it at the cost of their lives. Let us not be mere spectators. Let us be the inspiration for change. NO SILENCE TOWARDS VIOLENCE should be our slogan. ■

Delhi Press appoints ad sales director

Delhi Press has appointed Sabyasachi Ghosh as its Advertising Sales director. Ghosh will lead the advertising sales function across the group publications. Delhi Press publishes 32 magazines in nine languages that include titles such as *Grihshobha*, *The Caravan*, *Woman's Era*, *Champak*, *Sarita* and *Saras Salil*. Ghosh will be in charge of managing the revenue stream for the group – from advertising and sponsorship activities for its magazine brands, online sites, events and reader activations. His mandate is to work out the strategic and tactical programs for unlocking the latent values in many of the group's publications, developing marketing extensions around the existing portfolio, as well as nurturing some of the recent launches and acquisitions. Ghosh will reporting to Anant Nath, director, Delhi Press. Ghosh's appointment comes on the heels of induction of V. Natarajan as vice president – Brand Marketing and Strategy. Natarajan is spearheading the overall responsibility of brand management of Delhi Press magazines and also reports to Nath. ■



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When soaps froth violence

It surprises me to see the blatant and repeated violence in our daily soaps. One has to just switch popular channels during evening hours to find in a menu of staged reality shows, game shows and cookery shows, the dominant presence of daily serials. The various forms of abuse presented in these serials is simply mind boggling. Often, I have to ask my mother to change channels so that my son who is in the same room does not see these overt and brazen acts of violence. There are a number of reasons this display of violence bothers me but most prominently what worries me is that most of the violence is against women and it is shown so habitually.

On one hand, many are trying to fight this menace and setting up initiatives and even laws to curb this in our society. For example, organisations like ActionAid, Oxfam India, Sahayog, UNIFEM, Jagori and even various government departments are running programmes to curb such atrocities, including providing legal and counselling services and social support, working with men and boys on violence against women and also working on cases of violence based on caste or religion. Some like Breakthrough have a special media initiative on this issue called the 'bell *bajao*' campaign that has even been promoted by few of the popular television soaps.

Violence against women is a serious problem in India. The National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-3) collected information

from married and unmarried women about their experience of physical and sexual violence. Overall, one-third of women age 15-49 have experienced physical violence and about one in 10 have experienced sexual violence. In total, 35 per cent have experienced physical or sexual violence. This figure translates into millions of women who have suffered, and continue to suffer, at the hands of husbands and other family members.

Similarly, in a recent study done by CMS for CEQUIN on Perception and Experience of Gendered Violence in Public Places of Delhi, 98.6 per cent respondents have reported to having faced harassment in public places in Delhi. The social and economic costs of violence against women are enormous and have ripple effects throughout society. Women may suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities, and limited ability to care for themselves and their children.

In response, government and civil society are spending resources and efforts trying to raise awareness and voices against violence against women – but violence and disrespectful behaviour shown brazenly and repeatedly on our daily soaps is negating these efforts. While some of these soaps even claim to be on or against these social issues they repeatedly show and reinforce negative images and storylines, perhaps ending in few minutes of positive or reinforcing messages against the social trend. Other soaps, specially regional

language soaps, don't even have an excuse – their format and flow of daily storyline does not even need a reason to show continuous scenes of wife-beating and other such acts of misdeed. It's either gory scenes of violence and crime or complete storylines on the planning and scheming of these brutal scenes or events, completely ignoring that such acts are crime and are punishable offence.

My friends in the media often reason that they reflect our society and use the egg and the chicken argument to justify their stand. While they may not be entirely wrong, their case is weakened by the fact that they often take an aberration or one single case and showcase it as a normal or routine issue. In many cases, this may have led to prominence of the issue itself, but in most cases such anomaly or even a trend is only used to bring in elements of drama, diversion and delight in the storyline or sometimes for just differentiation. Examples are the so-called social soaps whether on the child marriage or female foeticide – the issues or their implications or even their exoneration is not the agenda – but in disguise of this 'new angle' create the necessary drama required in a soap. The peg may be on social injustices, yet the negative and violence is constantly repeated, providing an unclear message. How else can you explain the more negative messaging that we currently see on our television diet?

One may argue that it's a positive initiative to bring such issues to our homes. However, it's

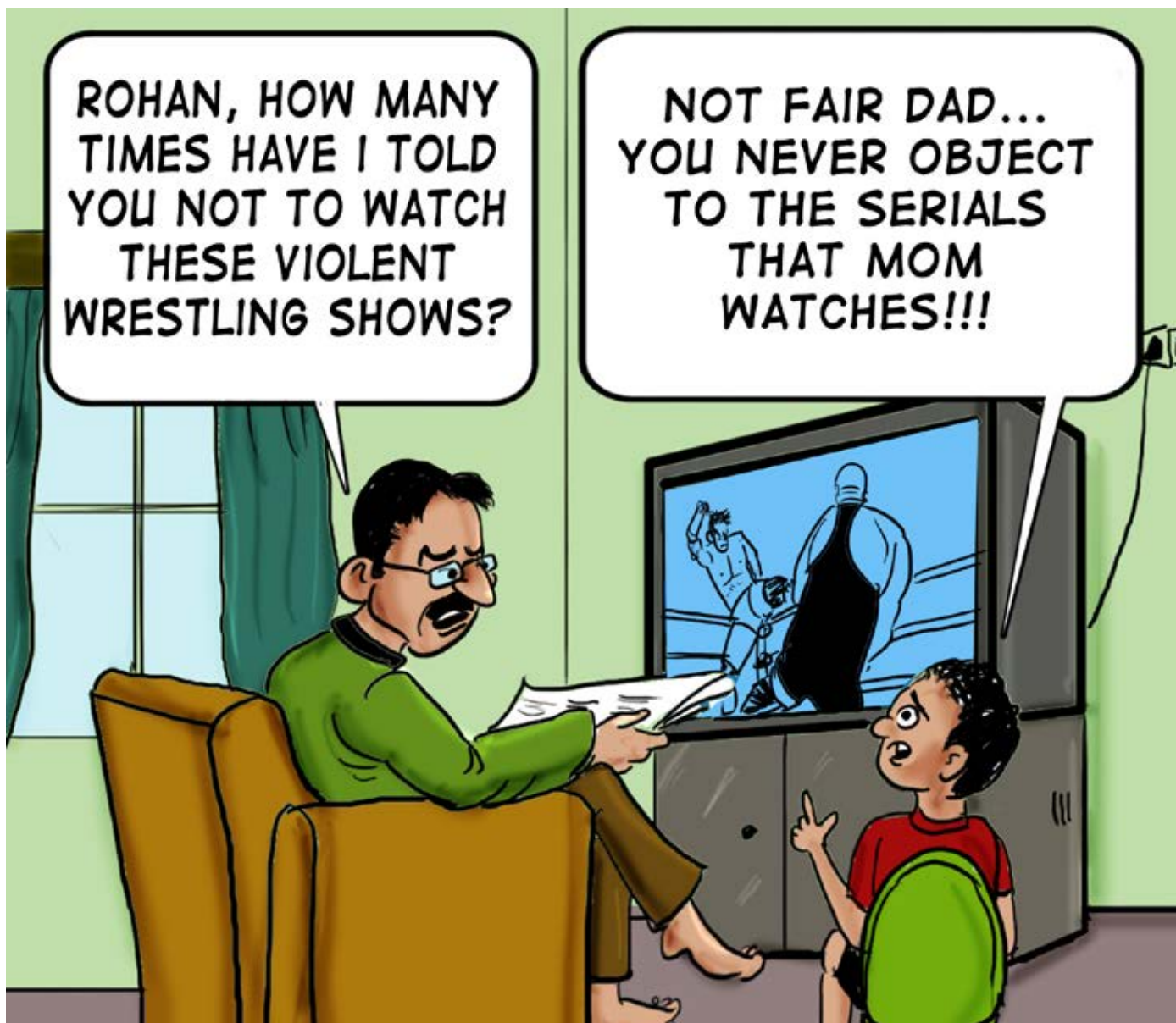


Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

important to audit what's depicted. It would be wrong to romanticise such a serious issue. While violence has been part of entertainment for many decades now, its current graphic, gruesome and frequent depiction in our drawing rooms is quite frightening. It not only numbs us to this aggression but also creates an atmosphere in which aggression against women is "normative, even acceptable."

Interestingly, the current applicable program code (in the Cable TV Network Act) states that "the cable operator should strive to carry programmes in his cable service which project women in a positive, leadership role of sobriety, moral and character building qualities." Apparently, we have the intention and even the broad guidelines in place. Now, its time for audiences like

us to also start voicing our protest to televised violence in our daily soap regimen. ■

P.N. Vasanti

(The writer is director, Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi. The article had appeared earlier in Mint and is being reproduced here with the writer's permission.)

‘After this gang rape, India must take the lead’



Pamela Philipose

The horrific gang rape of December 16 on a bus in Delhi has led to a lot of asking. What is it about Indian society that has allowed such crimes to flourish? How are women's lives to be secured against sexual predators? How are survivors to recover their sanity and spirit after the grievous assaults on them? The questions never end really. Playwright and international women's activist Eve Ensler doesn't claim to know all the answers, but she has been grappling with such questions for years. Her play, *The Vagina Monologues*, which debuted on Broadway in 1996 and has since been enacted in over 140 countries, reflects this eloquently

In one of those curious juxtapositions life throws up, Ensler's tour of India to raise awareness over her One Billion Rising campaign – calling for an end to violence against women globally – coincided with hundreds of thousands of Indians literally rising in protest against the gang rape of the Delhi student and the exponential increase in crimes against women in India. “One Billion Rising is happening right here!” she exclaimed, calling the new activism on India's streets “motivating”. As she put it to the media in Kerala, it's very important that India, especially its youth, take the lead in this moment of distress.



Photo: CodePink

For American playwright Eve Ensler (left), the act of breaking silences and asserting the unexpressed is the beginning of change.

(The New Delhi-based writer is director, Women's Feature Service, a features agency mandated to make visible gender in media (www.wfsnews.org). Earlier, she was senior associate editor with The Indian Express. She has been awarded the Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist and the Zee-Asthiva Award for her journalism.)

For Ensler, the act of breaking silences and asserting the unexpressed is the beginning of change. *The Vagina Monologues*, which has been performed by iconic actresses such as Meryl Streep and Susan Sarandon as indeed by hundreds of ordinary women around the world, brought to the public stage hitherto unarticulated aspects of women's bodies and lives. In a more recent work, *I Am An Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls Around The World* (2010), it was the girls who got to monologue on their hidden fears, desires and experiences – an expression of ‘girl energy’ in Ensler-speak.

Mumbai, one of Ensler's stops during her India tour, is familiar with her work, with *The Vagina Monologues* having been translated into Marathi. According to Nandita Shah, co-director of Akshara, a Mumbai-based organisation working on gender justice concerns, Ensler's greatest strength has been her ability to



Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues, which has been performed by iconic actresses like Meryl Streep and Susan Sarandon as indeed by hundreds of ordinary women around the world, brought to the public stage hitherto unarticulated aspects of women's bodies and lives.

reach out to people, especially the youth. Says Shah, "Ensler is an unusual activist. She uses theatre and popular culture to connect with young people. Just consider her slogan, One Billion Rising. It is so simple, anybody can understand it. At this juncture, after the horrific Delhi gang rape, people from all streams of life – not just feminists – are suddenly very conscious of women and violence issues and they want to do something about them. So there is a double connect that Eve has been able to achieve this time."

The India tour took off from Kerala, a state which despite its progressive veneer has seen a recent spate of extremely ugly incidents of violence, including women being sexually assaulted by their fathers, brothers, grandfathers. For Eve, who is herself a survivor of paternal sexual abuse, all this is just a reminder of the work that still needs to be done.

Feminist and trade unionist Nalini Nayak, general secretary of the Self Employed Women's Association, Kerala, believes that Ensler can actually provide Kerala's women with a chance to speak out on issues that have not figured in public discourse, "The women of Kerala have their own inhibitions about speaking on issues of sexuality, and here is someone who is actually encouraging them to do just that in a state where patriarchy is a huge problem and one that is not easy to address. There are some glimmers of change – films like *22 Female Kottayam*, for instance, seem to reflect new attitudes. Ensler's visit should also hopefully encourage young people in Kerala to question patriarchy and take it on."

Nayak, who has struggled for years to protect the rights of the fish worker against the plunder of the seas by global interests, is also struck by the comparison Ensler draws between the violence on women's bodies and the rape of the eco-system by free market forces. Comments Nayak, "There certainly is a close parallel. It causes one to look at the root of the problem. It provokes you to ask: 'why are societies so oppressive of women?'"

An assiduous blogger, Ensler's take on the world is worn on her sleeve – rather like the hennaed tattoos she recently sported in Kerala. A recent one went: "I write after days of reading devastating blogs, stories and emails arriving from women on the ground in Palestine and Israel and Syria. Women who have been fighting for peace and an end to occupation and violence. Women who report the terror of bombs landing around them and the tremors and explosions and loss of limbs and lives and hope. Women who are burying the small bodies of children and who report feeling manipulated and controlled by politicians who do not see them,

who use them merely as pawns in their game of power and rage.

"I write after the storm Sandy flooded New York and New Jersey – 23 US states in total – and the Caribbean, from Haiti to Jamaica to Cuba. I write in its aftermath, leaving neighborhoods and houses and lives destroyed. I write as drought and fires and extreme and unusual temperatures rage across the planet. I write as fossil fuel companies continue their drilling and plundering knowing that if this excavating of oil does not stop, it will soon be too late."

That is Eve Ensler in essence. As her friend and sister-in-arms, Delhi-based feminist Kamla Bhasin puts it, "she approaches the issue of violence against women in a political way by making deeper connections – against militarism, against economic paradigms, against social relations that strip people of their dignity." Adds Bhasin, whose organisation, Sangat, is coordinating the One Billion Rising campaign in South Asia,

"I respect her because of this. That is why when she asked me to come on board this campaign I had no hesitation in doing so."

Bhasin is particularly touched by the fact that Ensler, a cancer survivor, has undertaken this long and arduous tour – four locations in all, Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai, Delhi and Dhaka – in her quest to get women in the region to break free. And not just women. Ensler is clear that if violence against women and girls has to end, men need to become "active allies" in a movement she terms Woman Spring. ■

(Courtesy: Women's Feature Service)

Ban the two-finger test in rape trials

The cries for freedom and justice are resounding surely and loudly in the national capital since the tragic death of the 23-year-old who was gang raped and brutally assaulted on a moving bus on the evening of December 16, 2012. There is a surging hope that the three-member Justice Verma Committee constituted to recommend provisions to amend the rape law will do justice to these calls

An advertisement announced to the public that they are welcome to send their responses to the Justice Verma Committee by January 5, 2013, on issues relating to “extreme sexual assault” and questions of stricter punishment. Amidst televised debates on castration and death penalty, there are many who are furiously at work, detailing major and minor reforms in the laws, courts, city planning and governance that can be put in place, even though it is unclear whether or not these constitute the terms of reference of the said committee. Women’s groups and feminist lawyers have been rather philosophical about being denied the chance to appear before the Committee to determine how the law should craft a just law. Indeed, everyone is optimistic that this time radical change will at long last happen.

The government, however, does not need a committee to

remind it of several submissions to get rid of the colonial, sexist and violent practice of the two-finger test. There is no law, which says that doctors must insert two fingers (sometimes more, some even quibble about the size of the fingers in our courts) in the vagina to figure out whether the hymen is distensible or not. This then leads to the inference that the rape survivor is habituated to sex, introducing past sexual history into rape trials. Past sexual history was disallowed in rape trials since 2003. However, the two-finger test, by medicalising consent, allows past sexual history of the raped survivor to prejudice her testimony.

This is true even in cases of aggravated rape where the burden of proof is reversed. An analysis of judgments pertaining to gang rape and other instances of aggravated rape shows that there is an increased reliance on the findings of the two-finger test since the burden of proof is reversed and the onus is on the accused to prove consensual sex.

The 2010 Human Rights Watch report, *Dignity on Trial*, collated judgments, medical opinions and interviews with experts to recommend to the government that the two-finger test should be scrapped. The report makes several excellent suggestions about how the medical protocols need to be changed in order to move towards a therapeutic jurisprudence, which would extend care and empathy to the rape survivor rather than blame and stigma. It is not too hard for the government to get its home

and health ministries together to set up a panel of experts to look at the relevance of the two-finger test as evidence. There is no scientific basis to this test, since no doctor can determine whether or not a woman has a sexual history, unless she chooses to narrate her sexual biography.

Women may not have hymens due to a number of reasons other than sex outside or within marriage. Women may masturbate, have sex with other women and/or men, or be celibate. So how does the two-finger test determine this personal history? And how is it relevant to determining whether or not a woman is sexually assaulted?

The origins of the two-finger test may be traced back to a French medical jurist, L. Thoinot, who believed that there are true and false virgins. Women with intact hymens could also be habituated since some women have elastic hymens. Not wanting to be fooled by such devious hymens, Thoinot advised medical students to insert a pipette, a cone or two fingers into the vagina. This, he believed, mimicked an erect penis. This was in 1898.

Jaising P. Modi’s medical jurisprudence textbooks almost verbatim quote these passages from Thoinot (1911 translation in English) until 2010. For instance, several editions of Modi plagiarise Thoinot almost verbatim. The two-finger test finds repetition in every other medico-legal textbook. These textbooks are used in courtrooms to discredit the survivor: “oh, she is habituated, she is lying about

rape” is a common refrain in trial courts. Or defence lawyers use such textbooks during trials to humiliate rape survivors: to ask them how long they were penetrated, how much and how did they know whether they were penetrated. They ask: did the accuse ejaculate, where did the semen fall and how was it complete penetration, if the victim did not care to notice where the semen fell? As if it matters to you when you are being raped how much penetration or ejaculation is enough, for the law!

There are scores of judgments where one finds dastardly descriptions of one finger being inserted in a child’s vagina, three or more fingers being inserted in a pregnant survivor’s vagina, description of old tears versus fresh vaginal tears, all amounting to a science fiction horror story, which amounts to sheer hatred of

women and not science. If rape survivors experience rape trials as a pornographic spectacle, it is not only the fault of the judiciary — after all the ministries of Home and Health can change the medical protocol.

To treat sexual violence as a public health concern, we do not need judicial reform. We need political will. Can we please shift focus from whether or not to castrate and how to castrate (which incidentally is defined as torture in international law and can only be implemented as a voluntary medical programme)? Is it possible for 24/7 television anchors, who dismiss activists making this demand by saying “oh, that’s ok”, to please not be “ok” about this? Is it possible to campaign to get rid of colonial and misogynist practices of subjecting survivors to the obnoxious two-finger test?

Surely women, children and men (yes, they too are subjected to this test under Section 377) do not deserve to be subjected to the violence of re-rape under the guise of medicine? We do not want to wait for the esteemed committee to give us *azadi* (freedom) from this violent practice. We demand that the government ban this test today. ■

Pratiksha Baxi

(The writer is assistant professor, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, JNU. Her forthcoming book, Public Secrets of Law: Rape Trials in India, will be published by OUP in 2013.)

(Courtesy: Women’s Feature Service)

Carbon footprint of news publishing

How much greenhouse gas results from the daily newspaper? Is it possible to reduce greenhouse gases by reading the daily news on a computer screen or mobile device instead of on paper? These and similar questions have been addressed in recent years by a variety of European studies. A new report from the Shaping the Future of News Publishing project of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers provides a clear overview of these projects and their results.

The report, Carbon Footprint of News Publishing, shows that, from an environmental point of view, there is no reason to reject the printed newspaper in favor of an electronic version. Depending on the reading habits and length of reading time, the printed newspaper in many cases beats online and mobile platforms, in terms of CO₂ production. This is an argument that has great relevance today, when print is under attack as a ‘deadwood’, tree-killing industry. A French retail food chain cited environmental reasons for its decision to stop using printed advertising. A Danish non-governmental organisation produced a list of measures that every citizen could take to protect the environment. One of these was: “Cancel your newspaper subscription.”

European forests are, in fact, growing, not shrinking: they’ve increased by 30 per cent since 1950. This means that, every year, European forests grow by an area corresponding to 1.5 million football pitches, or four times the size of London. The report, released during the World Publishing Expo in Frankfurt, Germany, also shows that the amount of energy required to produce newsprint is less than for all other types of paper used in publishing, and that the base material for a large share of newsprint is recycled waste paper. ■

A campaign against rape



Vibhuti Patel

The existing rape laws do not recognise the unequal power relations between the rape victim and the rapist. The victim is not given a choice to get her voice heard by her own lawyer. She faces sexist biases and hostility at every step – inside the family, within the community, at the police station, at the time of medical examination in the government hospital and in the courtrooms. The criminal justice system expects the victim to not only get over the trauma and be calm and composed at the time of prosecution but also shed all her inhibitions and give a vivid description of the event in the courtroom. The attitude of judges in cases of rape is another deplorable area. Some feminist lawyers have put forward a demand for special courts for rape trials to ensure speedy dispensing of justice. Majority of judgements in rape cases are coloured by the preoccupation of the judges with 'past sexual history' of the victim and their notions of 'virginity', 'purity' and 'chastity' of women. Gender-sensitisation programmes for judges must be given top priority by the state. It is also suggested that the redefinition of rape must be brought out of the patriarchal confines where 'penetration of penis' only is taken into consideration while defining rape

The women's rights movement in India gained a national character with an anti-rape movement in 1980. Its genesis lay in the excesses committed by the state repressive machinery during the Emergency (1975-76). For many middle class women it came as a rude shock. Post-Emergency, civil liberties organisations highlighted the rape of women in police custody, the mass rape of poor, untouchable and Muslim women during caste and communal riots, and sexual molestation of tribal women by the Central Reserve Police Force, State Reserve Police and other paramilitary forces. The print media gave wide coverage to the testimonies of victims of sexual violence. Many began to question the powers given to the police and state authorities in the control of people's lives. In 1980, when the Supreme Court of India gave its verdict on the Mathura Rape Case, there was a national outcry.¹

Mathura, a teenage tribal girl was raped by two policemen in the police station at the dead of night while her relatives were weeping and wailing outside. The legal battle began when a woman lawyer took up her case immediately after the event in 1972. The Sessions Court blamed Mathura for being a woman of "easy virtue", and the two policemen were released. In the High Court, the accused were given seven-and-a-half years imprisonment, a judgement that was reversed by the Supreme Court, which held that Mathura had given wilful consent as she did not raise any alarm.² The resulting nationwide anti-rape campaign in 1980 demanded

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¹ Vibhuti Patel: *Women's Liberation in India*, New Left Review, No. 153, 1985.

² Tukaram and Ganpat versus State of Maharashtra, 1979, Supreme Court of India, Delhi.

the reopening of the Mathura Rape Case and amendments in the Rape Law.³ Prominent lawyers took up the issue, as did the national and regional language press. New groups of women were formed around this campaign. They organised public meetings and poster-campaigns, performed skits and street-theatre, collected thousands of signatures in support of their demands, staged rallies and demonstrations, submitted petitions to MLAs and the prime minister, and generally alerted the public to the treatment meted out to the rape victims. The initiative came from the middle-class, educated and urban women. Later on, political parties and mass organisations also joined the bandwagon.⁴

Reforms in rape laws

The demand for the amendments in the Rape Law touched a wide variety of issues concerning social construction of sexuality that were reflected in the assumptions in the law and in civil society about women, past sexual history of the rape victim, procedures of the criminal justice system, the FIR, inquest, medical examination, and the rights of women in custody. Two booklets represented the debates and discussions amongst the feminists and the democratic rights activists on gang-rape, custodial rape, rape in the family, burden of proof, etc.⁵ When the national conference on Perspective for Women's Liberation Movement in India was held in Bombay in November 1980, the proposed rape bill was the most controversial issue. As a result of rigorous debate amongst the feminists, it was resolved that demands of the women's organisations should be as follows:

1. A woman should be interrogated only at her dwelling place.
2. During interrogation by a police officer, a woman should be allowed to have a male relative or friend or women social workers present with her.
3. Women who are detained in custody should be kept in a separate lock-up meant for women only. If there is no such lock-up available then the women should be kept in a children's or women's home meant for the protection and welfare of women.
4. The medical report of a rape victim should state the reasons for arriving at the conclusions and should be forwarded without delay to the magistrate to avoid possibility of tempering.
5. During a trial, the past sexual history of the rape victim should be excluded from the evidence.
6. A police officer who refuses to record a complaint should be guilty of an offence.
7. Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code which clarifies that the consent of the woman in order to be considered as consent must be absolutely free and voluntary must be amended in view of the Mathura case.
8. The provision about 'burden of proof' in Section 111a of the Indian Evidence Act must be changed and it should be added that in cases where the accused in a rape trial is a public servant, police officer, superintendent or manager of a jail or hospital or remand home, where sexual intercourse is proved and the woman makes a statement on



Photo: Vibhuti Patel

Women campaign against eve-teasing and sexual assault in Mumbai.

oath that she did not consent to the sexual intercourse, then the court shall presume that she did not consent.⁶

The last point raised a major controversy as many feminists felt that in all cases of rape the burden of proof should be on the accused and not on the victim, given the nature of the offence, the dominant position of men over women and the impossibility of proving lack of consent except by stating that she did not consent. While women activists from the background of the mass movements felt that such provision could be abused to victimise the male members of the trade unions by managements and the male activists of Dalit, tribal and peasant organisations by the local vested interests.

Criminal Law Amendment Act (1983)

After three years of heated debates in women's groups, media and the Law Commission of India, Parliament passed the Criminal Law Amendment Act

³ Neera Desai and Vibhuti Patel: *Indian Women-Change and Challenge in the International Decade, 1975-85*, Sangam Publications, 1990.

⁴ See Vibhuti, Sujata, Padma (Forum Against Rape): *The Anti-Rape Movement and Issues Facing Autonomous Women's Organisations in India* in Miranda Davies (Compiler): *Third World-Second Sex*, Zed Press, 4th Impression, 1987.

⁵ See Lawyers' Collective: *Rape and the Law*, Bombay, 1980 and Sudesh Vaid, Amia Rao and Monica Juneja: *Rape, Society and State*, People's Union for Democratic Rights, New Delhi, 1980.

⁶ Vibhuti Patel: *Needs and Rights: Experiences of Women's Movement in India*, United Nations University, 1984.

(1983). This Act amended the Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act with respect to the law relating to rape. According to this Act, revealing the identity of a rape victim is an offence. Though the Act maintains more or less the same definition of rape, it introduces many new categories of offence of sexual intercourse by persons in custodial situations, such as superintendents of hospitals, remand homes, prison and police officials with women in their custody. In cases of custodial rape, the burden of proof lies with men and if a woman victim makes a statement that she did not consent, the court would believe that she did not consent. Feminists had demanded that marital rape should also be considered a punishable offence, but this demand was rejected and thus the government supported the popular social belief that a married man has the right to have sexual intercourse with his wife, with or without consent. The rejection certainly meant that the Act did not meet the aspirations of the women's movement. In spite of this limitation, popular debate on the subject enhanced self-confidence and the sense of solidarity within the women's movement.⁷

Definition of rape

The Act defines rape as being sexual intercourse with a woman under either of the following descriptions:

- A. Against her will.
- B. Without her consent.
- C. When her consent is obtained by putting her or any person in whom she is interested in fear of death or of hurt.
- D. With her consent, when the

man knows that he is not her husband and her consent is given because she is under an impression that he is her husband.

- E. With her consent when she is incapable of giving consent because of unsoundness of mind or intoxication.
- F. With or without her consent when she is under 16 years of age.

The Act makes it clear that "penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary for the offence of rape."⁸ The only change made by the amended Act, is in the provision that sexual intercourse with consent, when it is obtained by putting any person in whom she is interested in fear of death or hurt, is rape.

Punishment for rape

According to Section 376 of the Act, the minimum punishment for rape is seven years and the maximum life imprisonment. If the judge finds valid reasons, he/she can impose a sentence of less than seven years. In the cases of 'custodial rape' or 'gang rape' the minimum sentence is of ten years and the offence is cognisable and nonbailable. Sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, who is living separately from him under a decree of separation or under any custom or usage without her consent, is punishable with imprisonment which may extend to two years. This offence is cognisable and bailable. This definition of rape makes it clear that the husband has a right to have sexual intercourse with his wife with or without her consent. The underlying notion in this provision that does not see a man guilty of raping his wife is that a woman is the private property of

her husband and he can use/abuse her the way he wants.

Many women's rights organisations had demanded that forcible sexual intercourse by a man with his wife should also be defined as an offence of rape. But the Law Commission of India refused this demand. At the same time, it introduced a new section, which makes forcible intercourse by a man with his judicially separated wife an offence. Commenting on this, a progressive legal activists' organisation, Lawyers Collective, commented; "This new section is a small step forward in the direction of recognising the rights of the wife not to be raped by her husband."⁹

Victim and the state

According to the criminal justice system in India, rape is an offence against the state, not a crime against an individual. The matter has to be reported by the rape victim to the police. The FIR prepared by the police, the inquest and identification parade conducted by the police and the medical examination report prepared by the recognised government hospital have a major bearing on the judgement. After the police files a charge sheet, the trial is conducted in a sessions court. During the trial, the victim has no choice to select a lawyer to defend her case. The state appointed public prosecutor represents her. The rape victim is merely the prosecution witness. Hence, during investigation and rape trial she is completely at the mercy of the state.

In a book by a retired Inspector General of Police S. K. Ghosh, there is an admission to the fact of police involvement and connivance in the cases of rape as a generalised phenomenon.¹⁰

⁷ Susie Tharu: *Slow Pan Left: Feminism and the Problematic of Rights*, paper presented at National Seminar on Indian Women-Myth and Reality in March 1989 at School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Calcutta. Also see, Neera Desai and Vibhuti Patel, 1990.

⁸ Flavia: *Journey to Justice-Procedures to be Followed in a Rape Case*, Majlis, Bombay, 1990.

⁹ A Lawyers Collective Publication: *Recent Changes in Laws Relating to Women*, Bombay, 1985.

¹⁰ S. K. Ghosh: *Women in Policing, Light and Life Publication*, Delhi, 1981.

In cases of custodial rape, such as rape of prisoners by the jailer and other prison staff or of a patient by her doctor or of a woman employee by her employer or of the women hostiles or inmates of remand homes by the members of the management; the state apparatus in most of the cases chooses either to maintain a conspiracy of silence or to hush up the case.¹¹ In many parts of the country where remand homes for minor girls do not exist, minor victims of rape are kept either in police custody or in prison, sometimes for eight to 12 years without any legal redress. In such cases, the rapists lead free, 'respectable' lives and the victims stay confined in institutions. In West Bengal, the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights has taken up the cases of such victims.¹²

When an individual woman accompanied by her relatives or neighbours approaches the police stations she has to meet with hostile or indifferent attitude of the custodians of law and order. Lewd remarks, jokes, double-meaning sentences, weird smiles and cynical laughter are used by the police force to generate fear and uneasiness in the minds of the victim seeking legal redress. Comments on her dress, hairstyle, looks, figure, sex appeal and overall physical attributes are considered to be a part of normal behaviour by the police officials. The National Conference on Rape in 1990 declared that "A woman victim of rape is raped twice – first by the culprit and then by the criminal justice system."¹³

Women activists

As a member of the Forum against Oppression of Women (FAOW) since 1980, I have been

experiencing the biases and misogyny of the criminal justice system that sees the rape victim as an offender. In response to a news item about the rape of a teenage construction worker by the three policemen and a bootlegger in 1980, FAOW (at the time known as Forum against Rape) decided to follow up the case. To get the case filed in the FIR we had to organise a demonstration in front of the police station. The police charged the women activists and the local social workers with 'riot, trespass and dacoity'.¹⁴ The event happened before the amendments in the rape laws were made; the situation has not changed even after the enactment of the legal reforms.

In 1983, when a six-year-old girl was raped by her neighbour, her uterus was ruptured and she had to be hospitalised. In spite of repeated pleas by the victim's mother, the police refused to register a case because there was no penis penetration. As the rapist did not succeed in penetration, he had inserted an iron rod and his fingers.¹⁵ Penis penetration remains the only and exclusive concern of the authority while deciding the rape case.

Sickening police attitude

Last year, as a member of an investigation team concerning the gang-rape of a middle-aged woman worker living in one of the slums of Bombay, we had several meetings with the police officer in charge of the case. We had found out from the victim and the community that the police did not help them in any way. The rape victim accompanied by her neighbour and social workers approached the policemen to file an FIR; the police were not only

indifferent but also very hostile. It was past midnight. The police station was busy making accounts of drugs they had captured in their raid. The police did not believe that a rape had taken place. When the victim kept on repeating that she was raped and other witnesses also supported her statement, the police officers and constables had a hearty laugh. They then cynically asked the victim, "Do you know the definition of rape?" The victim was totally dazed. She showed her injuries on the forehead, head, neck, hand, chest, etc. Without doing any paperwork, they just told the victim and her friends to go to the government hospital without any note or accompanying constable. In the hospital she was just given first aid, diazepam and pain-killer tablets. In the morning she approached a woman activist. Once again they went to the police station and after a great deal of verbal exchanges between middle-class women activists and the police officer, finally the FIR was filed but in the meantime all important evidence was lost.

Every police officer has an obsession with the crime record in his area. He has to ensure that it does not exceed certain 'limits' or else his chances of promotion will be jeopardised. Hence, many a time he shows reluctance to file cases of crimes against women. In 1982, we were associated in supporting a minor girl who was raped by a teenage boy. The victim's mother was in a state of shock and deep anguish and wanted to see that the culprit was punished. In a slum where all communities live, the victim's community who were migrant 'untouchable sweepers' from Haryana, faced the most discrimination. The police officer who conducted the inquiry was

¹¹ Maithreyi Krishnaraj (ed): *Women and Violence-A Country Report*, A Study sponsored by UNESCO, Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Bombay, 1991.

¹² *ibid*: See the section on Women's Action Groups and the State Machinery.

¹³ Report of National Conference on Rape, Forum against Oppression of Women, *Kali for Women*, Delhi, 1990.

¹⁴ See an evaluation report of one decade (1980-1990) of Forum against Oppression of Women: *Moving... But Not Quite There*, Bombay, 1990.

¹⁵ *ibid*. p. 7.

humane while dealing with the victim and her mother. But he kept on insisting that the case should not be filed as it would involve a long-drawn, tiring and humiliating legal battle. Moreover, the girl would get defamed; no one would marry her, etc. The victim would be kept in the government remand home, as she was a minor, till the case ended. But the mother wanted us to take up the case as it would teach all other miscreants in the slum a lesson. We argued endlessly with the police to convince him of the necessity to file a case. Finally, he confided to us that if the crime record in his jurisdiction increased, it would reflect on his career.

When a 16-year old poor girl was taken into custody, unlawfully confined, repeatedly gang-raped by the Bombay Suburban Railway Police, she became pregnant. The policemen quietly arranged her abortion in the government hospital. When the girl managed to reach her home after some weeks she was bleeding profusely. Her relatives approached a feminist group. While conducting an inquiry we had verbal exchanges with the bosses of the rapist policemen. When we alleged that the higher authorities had colluded with the rapists they retorted: "Why are you so worried about this girl? After all she is a petty thief, a pick-pocket. It is good that our men taught her a lesson."

In urban as well as in rural India as a result of lumpenisation of socio-cultural life, in college and school campuses, on lonely roads, on buses and trains, in middle-class neighbourhoods and in slums, incidences of eve-teasing have increased. Earlier, the law enforcement machinery was not taking any cognisance of it. Women's groups in Delhi played a very important role in getting the issue officially recognised. Eve-teasing and ragging during

certain festivals (such as Holi, the kite-flying festival in Gujarat or balloon throwing during the month of Shravan) have provoked many women as well as women's groups to protest against the law enforcement machinery. Eve-teasing of women by bus conductors and bus drivers, railway police, road traffic police are still not paid attention to, in spite of the legal provision. Most often, women or girls do not report incidents of harassment such as obscene phone calls or lewd remarks by miscreants for fear of getting into trouble. When the protectors of law and order have a reputation of being eve-teasers, how can we expect women to approach them? Class, caste and communal biases along with gender bias of the police and other bodies of the state are responsible for apathy, inertia, indifference and hostility faced by women when they seek support in the cases of eve-teasing.

Madhushree Dutta case

Two years ago, noted film and stage director Madhushree Dutta was badly molested by two railway policemen in plain clothes in the railway station at around midnight. At the time of molestation she was not alone. Flavia, a feminist lawyer, was with her. Both of them being associated with the women's rights movement for over a decade and fully aware about the legal provisions immediately prepared a notice against the molesters. When they went to submit their write-up at the police station, the police officer in-charge refused to cooperate. Madhushree being well-known in media circles, the news of the incident appeared the very next day on the front page of leading newspapers in India. In response to the news reports, a strong protest demonstration was organised by women's groups to demand suspension of the police officer as well as the molesters. To make her withdraw the case, the policemen

kept on making anonymous and threatening phone calls to her lawyer's office. The court trail was an extremely humiliating experience as the defence counsel hired by the policemen kept on shooting question after question implying that for a budding artiste like Madhushree it was a cheap publicity gimmick to get into the limelight. If a woman, so articulate, visible and well connected with the media world, aided by an equally strong and articulate feminist lawyer, had to face such terror tactics by the police, you can imagine what must be happening to ordinary and helpless women victims of sexual violence! The incident happened in Bombay where anti-rape campaigns have consistently been taken up since 1978. Despite wide media coverage on the issue of sexual violence, the attitude of both the state as well as the civil society, as reflected in readers' reaction in the newspapers, was not sympathetic to the victim. Many asked why Madhushree was there at such a late hour.

An analysis of the judgements of the sessions courts, the high courts and the Supreme Court since 1980 by Flavia reveals an extremely negative view of the judiciary of women's sexuality. She gives several examples of rape cases where stereotypical arguments of victim-baiting were used liberally to reduce punishment to the culprits. Supposedly pro-women judgements in cases of rape of minors were also coloured by a conservative concern for 'chastity' and 'purity'. Flavia states, "The positive judgements which are reported involve rape of minor girls resulting in multiple injuries where the question of consent does not arise. But even these judgements have a conservative reasoning for the conviction. Here is an example of how the judiciary looks at the issue: Virginity is the most prized possession of an

unmarried girl. She would never willingly part away with this proud and precious possession."¹⁶

Mass rapes

Human rights organisations and the women's groups have provided detailed testimonies to the government of mass rapes of Dalit women during caste riots in Marathawad (1978), Ahmedabad (1983), Bhojpur (1985), Nagpur (1988) and communal riots in Delhi and Bombay (1984), Bhagalpur (1988) and Surat, Bhopal and Surat (1993) to the government. In most of the cases, the state enforcement machinery was either indifferent to the plight of the victim or directly involved in perpetrating violence against the victim in collaboration with anti-social elements. But in none of the above mentioned cases the criminal justice system brought the culprits to book. Raising an issue about the role of the Indian military and para-military forces in the torture and rape of women in Assam, Tripura and Nagaland, Punjab and Kashmir, tribal regions of India and in Sri Lanka generates a great deal of hostility in government circles.

During the 1980s, the women's movement in India was concerned mainly with fighting against sexist behaviour of the state enforcement machinery but now its efforts are more in the direction of creating a pro-women environment so that the victims of sexual violence can get legal redress and societal attitude towards women's sexuality can change. Articulate women journalists, researchers, academicians, independent consultants and activists attend government-sponsored training programmes and act as resource-persons for 'gender-sensitisation' of police officers, administrators, judges, etc.

In the beginning of the anti-rape movement, many women's groups had put forward the demand to the state that it should increase its number of women judges to ensure gender-justice and more policewomen to ensure sympathetic treatment to victims. But the last one decade has given ample evidence that just by virtue of being women they are not going to be more sensitive or judicious about women's issues. Women judges and women police being representatives of the state do not behave differently from male judges when it comes to taking sides. After all, Maya Tyagi was inhumanly tortured by a woman police constable who also encouraged her male colleagues to rape her. Women officials in jails and remand-homes behave as inhumanly with women in their custody as their male counterparts. The government had set up several judicial inquiries to contain public fury after an individual case of rape or cases of mass rapes were reported. Reports of the inquiry commissions gather dust in government offices. None of the recommendations are implemented. For the government, the exercise is a sort of safety valve to contain public fury.

PILs, media's role

Women's groups have filed PILs to activate the state enforcement machinery and to sensitise the masses. *Manushi*, a women's magazine filed a PIL in the Supreme Court after the Delhi riots in 1984 in which hundreds of Sikh women were raped and who are still languishing in refugee camps. So far, none of the culprits have been charged. When a tribal woman, Guntaben, was raped by eight policemen, paraded naked, brutally

beaten and verbally abused, the concerned police station, district magistrate and the hospital staff got together to hush up the matter. There was an atmosphere of terror in the community. Two women's groups and democratic rights organisations filed PILs and continued their campaign. The government responded by setting up a tribunal which declared that the rapists must be punished. Amnesty International took up the case. Finally, the culprits were punished.

Media publicity has proved to be the most effective tool in activating the state apparatus. In the post-Emergency period, investigative journalism received pride of place in mainstream media. While on the one hand a plethora of sensational articles trivialised the issue, on the other, several sensitive portrayals found space. Many protest actions by women's groups and mass organisations against rape of poor, Dalit, tribal or minority women without media coverage would have been ruthlessly crushed. Media publicity can be a double-edged sword. Gender sensitisation programmes for journalists and other mass communication personnel are thus viewed seriously by the women's groups. ■

¹⁶ Flavia: A Critical Review of Enactments on Violence against Women during the Decade 1980-1989, Economic and Political Weekly, April 25, 1992, w.s. 19-33.

Gender, media and human rights



Shoma A. Chatterji

Media representations in general and of women in particular are deeply embedded in political and economic contexts. Studies from India point to the often-contradictory ways in which the media and advertising are compromising women's multiple identities in contemporary society. Images of the 'new woman' as an independent consumer whose femininity remains intact, or as a hardheaded individualist whose feminine side must be sacrificed, illustrate new stereotypes of women whose 'femaleness' is always the core issue.

Since the 1980s, the women's movement has been engaged in a systematic and constant critique of media institutions and their output. Women's representation in the media helps to keep them in a position of relative powerlessness. The term 'symbolic annihilation' coined by George Gerbner in 1972, became a powerful and widely used metaphor to describe the ways in which media images render women invisible. This 'mediated' invisibility is achieved not simply through the non-representation of women's points of view or perspectives on the world. When women are 'visible' in media content, the manner of their representation reflects the biases and assumptions of those who define the public - and therefore the media - agenda. Despite measures to redress gender imbalances, the power to define public and media agendas is still largely a male privilege.

The aim here is to emphasise the need to bring gender within the scope of human rights and to illustrate how every case of insensitive/invisible/partial writing/reporting is as much a violation of human rights as it is of gender rights with the help of our ancient text, the Mahabharata, and reporting on one contemporary incident, the curfew during the Gujarat riots in the mid-1980s.

Gendered politics of knowledge

The separation between politics and knowledge is artificial and false. Politics is supposedly kept distanced from knowledge because the former is considered to be a source of contamination within the scheme of the structuring of knowledge. On the other hand, it is argued that political knowledge is essentially objective. If one probes a bit deeper, knowledge is deeply gendered in a patriarchal society at various levels as follows:

What constitutes knowledge is decided by men of dominant sections of society. An example is the division of knowledge between theory and experience which claims that men's voice is theoretical and that women's voice is experiential.

Most knowledge produced by men of dominant sections of society is generalised and passed as human knowledge. Dominant anthropology and history claims that men built civilizations. This has been accepted

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Illustration: Arun Runkumar

and acknowledged by major theoretical frameworks about human evolution. But feminists underscored the fact that women had discovered agriculture.

Women are excluded from the process of knowledge and as subjects of knowledge within disciplinary knowledge. Any major text on Western political thought will throw up examples of how women are excluded while bestowing authorship.

Women are almost always excluded as subjects of knowledge. For example, in any stratification study, the status of the household is marked by the economic status of the man, despite the statistical reality of around 60 per cent of Indian households being headed by females.

Knowledge produced by women is labelled 'deviant'. For example, most women who were burnt to death during the medieval ages after being declared to be 'witches'

were actually healers and early health guides. Feminist historians raise questions about these killings being coincidental with the medical profession emerging as a profitable male profession with the blessings of the church.

Patriarchy, therefore, established and perpetuated the myth that men make knowledge and women keep and maintain tradition.

The tragedy of Draupadi¹

The game of dice is the central episode in The Mahabharat. The orchestration, choreography and script that builds up, sustains and establishes the game of dice is totally conceived, executed and dictated by patriarchy. When Vidura has a premonition that something terrible is going to happen even before the invitations are sent out, Dhritarashtra says: "Do not worry. Nothing untoward will happen in my presence and in

the presence of Bhishma." Thus, whatever happens is seen as part of 'the divine plan'. Duryodhana escapes the responsibility of his actions by saying: "One and only One governs all actions and the script of governance is in place even before the human being is born. It is He whose commands I am following."

Draupadi's *vastra-haran* (disrobing) in the court in full view of everyone present is the worst violation of human rights imaginable; the sole voice of doubt is that of Vikarna who asks: "Are we truly conducting ourselves in accordance with dharma?" But Karna snubs him at once. "All these men, do you think they know nothing?" Draupadi stands for no more than a 'symbol' of the honour of the Pandavas; her body is a blank page on which scripts of revenge and humiliation, the story of men fighting like a pack of dogs are written; when she

¹Purushottam Agarwal: *Why Should We Listen to Her? – Draupadi in Mahabharata*, Paper presented on Special Invitation at Second Calcutta Research Group's Media Programme & Creative Media Workshop, January 2005.

raises the question of whether a lady of the royal family deserves this treatment, Duryodhana says that she deserves this treatment precisely because she is a lady from the royal family. She **has** to be humiliated because she is the 'woman' of the enemy. Thus, she is denied all agency and individuality.

Contemporary poet Suman Kesahri imagines what the original author denied Draupadi by stating what Draupadi would have said had the author given her a 'voice': "Draupadi, Panchali, Krishna, Yajnaseni – all of these are adjectives, none of them is a noun. Did it ever strike you that I have no name? I had only raised some questions, I only had some queries. And you have taken away even my name!"

Curfew is a kind of violence²

In the mid-1980s when Ahmedabad was caught in the trap of violent riots, the media completely missed out on the debilitating impact of the curfew on the lives of ordinary citizens, particularly the poor, who cannot afford to stock up on provisions. (Ammu Joseph, January 2004.) During the riots and after, curfew was imposed round the clock, often for as long as seven to ten days at a stretch, at times even touching the maximum permissible limit of 500 hours. It forced large families to survive for days on the meagre provisions they had at home when curfew was announced – often at the dead of night. The entire onus of managing the difficult situation, of feeding hungry families with nothing beyond onions, gram and wheat flour, of pacifying wailing children with black tea, fell on the women.

The media missed out on these stories because they had not talked to women, especially poor women,

in the affected areas. Their reports were based on information and analysis gleaned from 'authorities' or 'leaders' of various groups and sundry 'experts'. The tendency was to dismiss the imposition and relaxation of curfew with a single, bland sentence or none at all. Talking to women actually suffering due to the curfew would perhaps have worked as persuasion to the authorities concerned to devise practical solutions to solve the problems of common people suffering for no fault of their own.

In the 1980s, an estimated 29 to 33 per cent of the women organised by SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) were sole supporters of their families; a substantial percentage of the rest earned more than the male members; it could be easily understood that a major slice of the women's incomes went towards meeting the basic needs of their families whereas a substantial portion of the men's earnings is often spent on drinking, smoking and gambling. So, women's loss of income during the five months of trouble proved disastrous for a large number of families. As a result of this media 'invisibility', the relief work of the government did not consider the loss of livelihood suffered by thousands of women working in the informal sector. Their families, therefore, did not receive the kind of help they needed to survive in the short-term, and to rebuild their lives in the long-term.

These findings and others, clearly illustrate that despite the small shifts noted in retrospective analyses, the media content, by and large, still reflects a masculine vision of the world. A wide-scale social and political transformation, in which women's rights - and women's right to communicate - are truly understood, respected and implemented both in society

at large and by the media needs emphasis.³ The manipulation of gender images by male-dominated media should make us critically examine what we see every day on TV, in magazines and newspapers. Global media-monitoring programmes undertaken by different groups in different countries show that nothing much has changed over the years. The same misrepresentations and stereotypes persist. Women continue to be marginalised.

On the one hand, by endorsing a few liberal reforms like equal pay, the media reinforces the message that women have every right to expect to be treated as equal citizens, with the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as men. On the other hand, by mocking and dismissing the way feminist activists look, dress, behave and talk, the media also endorses the notion that in some cases, female subordination and sexual objectification were not only fine but desirable as well.

The contradiction, sanctioning the notion of women as autonomous and equal citizens while also endorsing the idea that women are around to be gazed at (advertisements, beauty contests, fashion parades, film), is the contradiction that lessened women's potential then and has the same effect today. Although the media did foster the spread of the liberation movement through its vast coverage, the media also hampered the movement's potential and women's potential as individuals by placing female attractiveness at the forefront.

While gender is often seen as a narrow, special interest issue, gender awareness can lead to a better, more holistic understanding of any situation. ■

² Ammu Joseph: *What is Gender-just Reporting?* Paper presented on Special Invitation at Second Calcutta Research Group's Media Programme & Creative Media Workshop, January 2005.

³ Margaret Gallagher: *Gender Setting – Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy*, Zed Books, 2001.

An effective mechanism to resolve disputes



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The *mahila* panchayat has been found to be a cost-effective and gender-sensitive method of finding resolutions to domestic violence, and several women have benefited. It is an informal legal mechanism, easily accessible to women from poor economic backgrounds. There are no lengthy legal procedures for seeking justice.

Solidarity groups backed by the community are important despite the availability of other legal and stringent alternatives for countering the problem of domestic violence. To reduce the extent and severe effects of violence on women, the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act was enacted in India in 2005. However, there were several initiatives before, which led to enactment of the Act and are still found to be functional and quite relevant to people at the grassroots for whom resorting to legal measures is tough and expensive.

The *mahila* (women's) panchayat was planned by an alliance of NGOs working with women living in the urban slums of Delhi to protect them against domestic violence and adopted by the National Commission for Women. The success of the concept of the *mahila* panchayat assured that violence can be mitigated at the community level if proper assistance is available to the victims and neighbourhood support groups can cooperate in protecting the victims. In this context, a study was planned to take stock of the extent of domestic violence and its impact on the personal and family lives of women and to ascertain the existing support services rendered by *mahila* panchayats to the aggrieved women.

The study was carried out between October 2011 and February 2012 in seven resettlement colonies across Delhi. The respondents were women who had filed cases of domestic violence in the local *mahila* panchayat, an innovative collective approach for community participation in dispute redressal. It helps tackle local legal disputes and assists in reducing violence against women. After need assessment and motivation, community leaders are identified and the women are motivated to volunteer as *mahila* panchayat members. The members are trained in legal issues, dispute redressal mechanisms, laws relevant to crimes against women and given exposure to the existing legal position regarding property, maintenance, marriage, custody, etc. They are also trained to provide counseling, write content for an FIR, pursue with the police station, and proceed for legal recourse. The *mahila* panchayat acts as a watchdog and its members, after orientation and training, can handle sensitive family disputes.

The findings of the study provide insights into the extent of domestic violence and ways in which a community effort can help curb it. Thirty women, whose cases were settled or were in process of resolution, were interviewed; 25 were in the 20-40-year age group. Clearly, younger women are more vulnerable to domestic violence. In the case of older women,

age confers a certain amount of power that allows them to protect themselves against spousal violence.

Vulnerability

The educational levels of the victims were low. The majority (17) of women were found to be illiterate and were married at young age. As far as economic independence was concerned, more than half (20) were unemployed and only ten women were earning.

All the women reported experiencing verbal and emotional abuse; 28 said that they had experienced physical violence; 27 had experienced economic abuse. Ten women said they were forced to have sex by their husbands. The women experienced reproductive and psychological abuse and three women reported that because of repeated sexual intercourse they had to bear severe pain. Eight women revealed they had thought of committing suicide, while two had indeed attempted suicide. Half the women interviewed said they were beaten up almost every day by their husbands.

Causes

The root cause which led to episodes of violence was alcohol consumption by husbands, the study revealed. The National Family Health Survey 3 (2005-06) findings show that “women whose husbands drink alcohol have significantly higher rates of violence than women whose husbands do not drink”. The second reason for violence was found to be financial. Factors such as poverty, traditional patriarchal values and early marriage deprive women of education. As a result, they are married off early, lack skills for employment and are financially dependent on their husbands.

In the study, more than half (16) the women reported that



Photo: Gouri Choudhury, Action India

Proceedings at a mahila panchayat.

their husbands did not give them sufficient money to meet household expenses. Three women said their husbands gave their entire salary either to their parents or spent it in gambling. The inability of husbands to provide sufficient money to meet domestic expenses led to episodes of violence. Dowry was found to be the third reason for domestic violence. Women were cursed and abused for bringing insufficient dowry. Another cause was found to be the unpleasant relationship with in-laws. Patriarchal values played a major role in perpetuating violence against women. One of the causes of violence in marital relationships was the birth of girl child. Six women faced violence because of the strong preference for a male child by their in-laws. Women had to face consequences for it, such as being sent back to their parents' home. One woman reported that when her second daughter was born, her husband denied being her father.

Reporting violence

Of the 30 women interviewed, only 13 had reported violence at home to the police. Six women revealed that after reporting the matter, they were not comfortable; it created further trouble in their lives. The women who reported violence were found to have raised their voice only when it had become intolerable or when the violence threatened their lives. Not surprisingly, majority of the women opened out to their parents first, followed by neighbours, relatives and friends. Mothers were always a source of support.

While 18 women said they were asked to return to their marital home and adjust by their parents and relatives, ten received monetary support from their parents. Two women reported that in order to resolve the conflict, the families (husband's and parents) assembled and intermediaries were chosen to try and find a

solution. However, it did not provide any relief.

Thirteen women said they wanted to sustain their marriage, but they wanted to live in a separate house with their husbands, away from the inlaws. Six women were willing to readjust and live within the joint family provided they were not physically abused by any member of the family. Only two women said they did not want to put any burden on their parents and therefore wanted to preserve their marriage.

Panchayat useful

The women's decision to report incidences of violence to the *mahila* panchayat received support from their mothers. Most of the women (24) filed their own case in the panchayat. Eighteen were accompanied by their mothers on their first visit to the panchayat. Two mothers motivated their daughters to fight against injustice; six mothers filed cases in the panchayat on behalf of their daughters. Overall, the women felt that the decision of the panchayat would be neutral and help them.

According to the women, the panchayat made it possible for couples to discuss their problems one-on-one. If panchayat was not able to solve a case even after four or five meetings, a case would be filed in court with the consent of the victim. The majority (22) of women reported satisfaction with the proceedings of the panchayat. Many reported that their husbands had started doing what they had promised. An in-depth

analysis of the solved revealed that the panchayat helped men and women to speak openly and resolve disputes. Here is a case study:

Ruksana was 19 years old when she got married. She lived with her parents in Aligarh and had never been to school. She came to Delhi after marriage. She has now been married for 15 years and has four school-going children. Her married life in the initial years was smooth but her relationship with her husband, Sajid, soured over the past four years when he started forcing her to have sexual relations with other men to get money. When she refused, he

tried to convince her by saying, "What is the problem when I am giving you the permission?" Even after being repeatedly forced, she refused. As a result, he started abusing her physically, economically and verbally. He used to insult and taunt her and stopped having sexual relations to punish her. He stopped giving her money for household expenditure and that became a major problem because it became difficult for her to feed her children.

Ruksana decided to file a complaint against Sajid in the *mahila* panchayat. In three meetings her case was solved. Her husband agreed and gave in writing that he would never force her to have sex with others, give her Rs 2000 for monthly expenditure to run the household and maintain healthy sexual relations with her. Sajid has lived up to his promise. Ruksana said if she had not sought the panchayat's help, her married life would have ended long ago. ■

Public service film on domestic violence launched

Vartika Nanda and 24 Frames Films have collaborated to launch the public service film *Nanakpura Kuch Nahi Bhoolta* focused on domestic violence. The film is based on noted writer and journalist Vartika Nanda's poetic journey, *Thee, Hoon, Rahungi*. It draws attention to the evils of domestic violence and calls for action. The film was released at the Vishwa Hindi Sammelan, Johannesburg, South Africa by Preneet Kaur, minister of state for External Affairs and Virendra Gupta, Indian high commissioner in South Africa.

The film reflects on the victims of domestic violence and their encounters at the Crime Against Women cells and ends on a positive note. Speaking about the film, Vartika Nanda said, "Most women choose to take no action and end up without a family, at times even lose their lives. Their biggest fear is defamation, because of which they continue to remain silent. Hope this helps them in finding their voice, airing their grievances, and the people to come out in support of these women. With this film and the book, I plan to reach out to maximum number of people, raise awareness, and call for action to put an end to these heinous crimes."

Thee, Hoon, Rahungi is the first ever collection of poems in India centred around the issue of crime against women. Nanda is assistant professor (Department of Journalism) in Delhi University's Lady Shri Ram College. She had earlier worked for Zee TV, NDTV, Lok Sabha TV and Sahara India Media. At NDTV, she was the head of the crime beat. Her PhD was on the coverage of rape cases by print media. She was the youngest television anchor (on Doordarshan) in Asia in the early 1980s. ■

Women provide lessons in managing disasters



Srabani Roy Maiti

When natural hazards appear to be directly linked to the loss of life and property, the social, economic and political causes of such hazards need to be analysed and can't be ignored. Often an understanding of vulnerability and the development of strategies for overcoming hazards can be advanced with the help of gender analysis. Traditional expectations and home-based responsibilities limit women's mobility and opportunities for political involvement, education, information, etc. Understanding their vulnerability allows an insight into strategies to deal with the causes rather than the symptoms. Let us look at the role women can play in reducing and managing the consequence of disaster through a participatory development-communication approach and see how women can become a force to reckon with rather than victims in the time of disaster

Human vulnerability to hazards is an age-old phenomenon. Disasters, whether natural or human-made, play havoc with the lives of millions of people every year around the globe. Their aftermath is nothing but a grim picture of death, destruction and suffering. While vulnerability is dependent on exposure to hazard, the magnitude of risk is directly proportional to vulnerability, duration and intensity. It has often been seen that people's vulnerability is generated by social, economic and political processes that influence how hazards affect people in varying ways and intensities – rapid population growth leading to the development of human settlements in disaster-prone areas, construction of big dams or embankments by constricting the natural flow of rivers, extension of settlements along a cyclone path, etc.



Due to frequent flooding most of the tube-wells are built on raised platforms; here is one such tube-well.

Community involvement and awareness generation, particularly that of the vulnerable segments of population and women have been emphasised as necessary for sustainable disaster-risk reduction. Communities are the first to respond to disasters and, therefore, unless they are empowered and made capable of managing disasters, any amount of external support cannot lead to optimal results. Gender analysis helps in understanding why some people are vulnerable to disasters and others not, and also in finding solutions to problems.

(The writer is a lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Asutosh College, Kolkata.)



Empowerment has enabled women to build grain banks for use during emergency. Women of a self-help group are seen here before a grain bank.

Women tend to be more vulnerable than men, as they have limited access to resources and are poorly paid. Traditional expectations and home-based responsibilities limit women's mobility and opportunities for political involvement, education, information, etc. Understanding their vulnerability allows an insight into strategies to deal with the causes rather than the symptoms. It also helps to identify ways in which men are vulnerable. The failure to identify gender roles and to plan programmes with such aspects in mind has resulted in the inequitable delivery of disaster relief assistance and inadequate attention to the potential long-

term outcomes of short-term interventions.

In any disaster, women and children are the worst affected. The post-disaster period usually sees rehabilitation and relief work being carried out by men. In most cases, aid workers arriving in the affected areas are greeted first by groups of men. Women from the affected community usually stand some distance away and hesitate to voice their grievances and needs to the male aid workers. Natural disasters impact women directly as their roles as providers of food, water and fuel are affected. Climate change can jeopardise sustainable livelihood strategies. Food security and family well-

Women are disproportionately employed in unpaid, underpaid and non-formal sectors of the economy. Inheritance laws and traditions, marriage arrangements, banking systems and social patterns that reinforce women's dependence on fathers, husbands and sons all contribute to their unfavorable access to resources and their lack of power to change things. The health dangers that result from multiple births can contribute to interrupted work and low productivity. Traditional expectations and home-based responsibilities that limit women's mobility also limit their opportunities for political involvement, education, and access to information, markets, and a myriad of other resources, the lack of which reinforces the cycle of their vulnerability (excerpted from Mary Anderson's 'Understanding the disaster-development continuum' in *Focus on Gender*.)

being are threatened when the resource base on which women rely to carry out their critical roles and obtain supplementary incomes is undermined. Effective risk assessment and management requires the active involvement of local communities and civil society groups. Therefore the knowledge, contribution and potential of women, too, need to be identified and utilised.

Women and girls are more exposed to sexual and domestic violence when there are disasters. Yet, safe shelters for abused women, where they exist, are usually damaged or closed; informal networks of support hardly exist. Concerns were raised that children misidentified as 'cyclone orphans' were trafficked into sex work following the Orissa cyclone, the Gujarat earthquake and Cyclone Aila. Girls in families forced by the losses in drought or cyclone may well be enforced into early marriage and as a result child labour increases. Rehabilitation post-disaster should not be restricted to physical reconstruction. Far more importance should be given to the reconstruction of lives by supporting women and community participation. Women should not be treated as victims but as partners who can equally participate in the reconstruction process. Strategically involving women in the relief phase could reduce corruption, ensure information flow to affected citizens and hold agencies and panchayats accountable.

Women can be powerful advocates for safety when they are viewed as experts and expert communicators. This was the case in India when the government of Norway and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) proposed to fund a radio programme produced and broadcast by women's groups to "ensure access to information at all levels, which is essential

When the German Red Cross and the Bangladesh Red Crescent committed to responding to the 1991 cyclone in gender-sensitive ways, the entire community benefited. Gender-balanced village disaster preparedness committees were formed to provide direct training to women. With men often out of town or engaged in field work, women were those who needed training about saving food and belongings and what to take to the shelter. The relief committee also sought to increase awareness among women and men about the need for gender equality, and clearly afforded women increased opportunities for exchanging ideas with other women.

Rohima Begum lives on Sandwip Island in the Yamuna-Ganges delta in Bangladesh. At the time of the catastrophic 1991 cyclone, which killed thousands of people, Rohima Begum, a widow, was living with her 2 children and her mother. She had no regular income and the family was hardly surviving. Like many other people on Sandwip Island, she lost the little she possessed in the cyclone. After the cyclone, with 11 other women, Rohima Begum went on a training course in food processing. The course was run by Nari Pragati, a local non-governmental organization focusing on women and development. The course was a great success... For the first time, Rohima's family has a regular supply of food and enough money to send her elder son to school. Now, they are better equipped to withstand the cyclone. With some savings put aside, they can afford a better balanced diet and they have reinforced their home against future next disasters.

Source: IDNDR Fact Sheet Series, 'Prevention pays: success stories featuring women and children.'

to the community-led and controlled process of recovery and reconstruction being envisioned.

When Super Cyclone Aila hit the West Bengal coast in May 2009, it left behind a massive trail of destruction that was quite unprecedented. According to official reports, 137 were killed and nearly two lakhs were

homeless. In the Sundarban Delta, the cyclone destroyed a 400-km stretch on the embankment, several villagers were flooded and farm land including crops was severely damaged; there was sizeable loss of animal life as well.

At the district level, the District Disaster Management Office was responsible for all pre- and

post-disaster preparedness and management. Also involved were sub-divisional information and cultural offices. Gradually, it became clear that the government was recognising women power and the roles they could possibly play. They, along with men, were taught to prepare stretchers, with blankets and sticks, to carry ailing



Women have organised temporary primary schools for children and provided food to the flood victims.

villagers and pregnant women; prepare ORS solution with boiled water, sugar and salt; prepare a resource map in the village where safer places were identified as were sources providing drinking water, health services, etc; keep an emergency kit containing voter ID card, BPL card, ration card, life saving drugs, dry food, etc; deal with pregnant women and lactating mothers during emergencies; grow vegetables on mud sacks kept on raised platforms made of bamboo stick as well as nurseries on banana stems and bamboo sticks; grow crops on raised dividers in the rice fields so that the plants didn't get submerged under water during floods; uplift the seedbeds of the agricultural field near the coastal areas; and learn to plant mangroves along the coastal line to prevent soil erosion.

It was due to the various training me that the administration was able to use the common people to face the challenges bravely. Indeed, the administration depended completely on women workers,



The devastation wrought by Cyclone Aila was immense.



Flood in the Kalindi Gram Panchayat area, after Cyclone Aila hit the coastal areas of Contai Sub-Division.

from rescue to relief distribution to extending psychological support to those affected.

Several villages in the Ramnagar II Block of Contai Sub-Division of Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal were severely affected. Here, women along with the local NGO, self-help group workers, rural health workers and the block administration formed the task force. Together, they guided the villagers to the temporary relief shelters, they carried disabled and pregnant women to safer places in stretchers, they made a count of family members, especially children, and they cooked and distributed food and ensured that safe drinking water was distributed. Women also played an important role in reconstructing the village road, they made mud dams and planted mangroves along the sea line under National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Women were eager to form self-help groups and work unitedly. They sent their children to school and themselves attended night school. "The cyclone really changed my life. I was very much inspired by the women groups that worked for us. Previously, after any disaster we used to feel helpless but this year things were different. We claimed for everything that was our right. We even demanded from

the administration a permanent flood shelter," said Minati Das, age around 25 and a resident of the village.

Most emergency programmes have failed to identify women's changing economic role as a major



Women receiving training on environmental issues.

factor in enabling communities to survive and rebuild. Similarly, they have not considered the importance of gender balance in rebuilding communities, or the role of women's organisations in promoting the balance. Violent change and catastrophe are indeed traumatic, but it is a means whereby old and dysfunctional relationships can be set aside and new ones created, in which

all members of the community have an opportunity to maximise their potential. Some women have developed guidelines for disaster practice, media campaigns and pilot projects that help reduce women's subordination and are practical as well, linking gender equality to sustainable development, on the one hand, and to disaster mitigation on the other.

In many instances, the experience of working side by side with a wife or husband, clearing roads or salvaging personal belongings from flooded areas, is a powerful positive influence that blanks out gender segregation. After Cyclone Aila, women reported that their husbands were listening to their opinions more. They attributed the change to the 'public' work that they did during the disaster when women received training in a range of nontraditional activity,

including masonry, carpentry, plumbing, agricultural extension, and natural resource management/forestry. It was further seen that some men now fulfilled social roles previously performed by women, including gardening, food preparation and water provision.



A ghastly crime in a tea plantation



Nava Thakuria

The last week of 2012 brought shocking news for the people of Assam. First reports were out December 26 about the incident in eastern Assam. Embittered by more than three decades of violence triggered by gun-toting youths belonging to various insurgent outfits, the citizens of the state now had to confront the horrific news that a tea estate owner and his wife were burnt to death by unruly workers. If that wasn't enough, there was more horror in store: some tea plantation workers had even bitten into the burnt flesh of the victim.

The police found two lumps of scalded bodies from the debris which were later identified as those of Mridul Kumar Bhattacharya and his wife, Rita. The incident occurred at the Konapathar Tea Estate falling under the jurisdiction of the Bordumsa Police Station in Tinsukia District of Assam, bordering Arunachal Pradesh. The 150-*bigha* tea garden, about 575 km from Guwahati, is owned by Bhattacharya's MBK Asia. The angry labourers, it is alleged, killed Bhattacharya and his wife and then set his bungalow afire.

Bhattacharya, 75, had a dispute with a section of tea labourers in the estate that he established two decades ago. An engineering graduate, Bhattacharya initially worked in various public sector undertakings before joining the tea plantation business. With a son (one of three siblings) living in America, Bhattacharya started exporting quality tea to that country.

According to eyewitnesses, Bhattacharya had a heated argument with nearly 1000 agitating workers. Trouble began when two labourers (Surjit Mura and Ajit Mura) were picked up by the police from the tea plantation colony in the morning. The workers believed that the police had acted following a complaint lodged by Bhattacharya. A small group of workers arrived in the campus where Bhattacharya was and requested him to get the detained labourers freed. However, Bhattacharya refused to entertain them and responded angrily. He asked them to remain quiet or face dire consequences. His behaviour annoyed the group and they returned to their colony.

After a few hours, a large group of workers, including women, assembled in front of Bhattacharya's bungalow. They surrounded the campus, filling the air with furious outbursts. They set two vehicles on fire and proceeded to attack Bhattacharya who was indoors with his wife. Police suspect that the angry workers assaulted both of them and then set the bungalow ablaze with petrol, kerosene and other inflammable material. The incident took place at 4 pm but the agitated workers remained till late evening while the bungalow burnt. The mob formed a ring to prevent police officials and fire brigade vehicles from approaching the site.

This was not the first time that Bhattacharya had rubbed labourers the wrong way. He was arrested two years ago for allegedly killing a teenager at the Rani Tea Estate on the outskirts of Guwahati. The adamant tea planter had then (March 22, 2010) faced a similar situation, when he opened fire on the mob resulting in the killing of the teenager and injury to several

(The writer is a senior journalist based in Guwahati.)

others, including women. Then too, the mob had set his bungalow on fire but he was rescued by the police. Since then, the tea estate has remained closed, rendering more than 300 workers jobless. After coming out on bail, Bhattacharya moved on to his other tea estate, in Tinsukia.

Assam accounts for around 50 per cent of India's annual tea production (nearly 990 million kg). India is the second-largest producer and consumer of tea in the world. Assam has more than 800 large tea estates, mostly in the eastern and southern part of the state and thousands of small tea growers, overall engaging more than 22 lakh people directly or indirectly. The cumulative tea production from nearly 69000 small tea gardens in the state is estimated to be 25 per cent of Assam's total production. Assam tea is recognised as one of the world's finest teas and it is exported to all countries in Europe and West Asia, including America and Japan.

Stating that "it was rare for the tea workers to react in such a violent way", Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi mentioned there might have been a 'third force' which indulged in the violence. This was understood to be a reference to the Maoists who have grown their sympathisers in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh Districts in the recent past. Various tea plantation and other organisations have expressed utter shock at the ghastly killing and demanded appropriate action against the culprits without delay. Political analysts believe that the state government might go slow in this case as the ruling Congress enjoys a huge vote bank among tea labourer families and panchayat elections are approaching (scheduled for January 30, February 6 and 12). Asom Chah Mazdoor Sangha, the largest tea workers union in Assam condemned the incident and said that such violence would

negatively impact the future of tea industry in the state.

The issue received more than a pinch of sensationalism when a senior police officer revealed that a section of angry workers had not spared even the charred body of Bhattacharya and few of them even ate his burnt flesh. Talking to the local media, S.N. Singh, inspector general of police (Law and Order), claimed that one Santosh Dhanowar, reportedly a prime accused in the murder, had confessed during interrogation that some angry workers had resorted to "cannibalism" that fateful evening. Tinsukia District police chief P.P. Singh confirmed the report, saying that at least three workers had vomited after consuming Bhattacharya's flesh. Police suspect it to be a well-planned conspiracy against Bhattacharya and arrested eight workers. Assam police chief J.N. Choudhury, citing preliminary investigations, confirmed that "there were a few workers from outside the tea estate (of Bhattacharya)" who played a convincing role in mobilising the crowd.

Assam welfare minister Prithivi Majhi, while condemning the violence adopted by the tea plantation workers, said that in most of the tea gardens the workers were "deprived of their dues for long". Majhi, a soft-spoken politician belonging to the tea workers tribe, added that he would continue appealing to tea garden owners to provide workers basic facilities, with access to education and health care, such that they did not feel deprived.

The condition of tea plantation workers in Assam remains pathetic though there are many laws (including India's 1951 Plantation Labour Act) to support them. The management of tea gardens has the responsibility to pay the minimum wage to labourers, in addition to providing basic medical facility, clean drinking water and sanitation. But sadly, none of the conditions are enforced fully in the gardens, where a tea leaf plucker (usually a woman) earns on average Rs 60 a day, where as the minimum wage in Assam is fixed at Rs 100 a day.

VIDURA

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The environment needs more focus



Swathi Karamcheti



Y.A. Maruthi

(Swathi Karamcheti is pursuing her PhD in Media and Environmental Communication at the Department of Environmental Studies, Institute of Science, Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management, Visakhapatnam.)

(Y.A. Maruthi is an assistant professor in the same department and Karamcheti's guide.)

A study was carried out to find out the attitude of journalists towards reporting about the environment. Twenty-eight reporters from India responded to the survey questionnaire that was posted online. It was found that though most of the reporters were not formally trained in reporting on the environment, all of them were interested in covering environmental issues. Surprisingly, many media houses did not seem as keen

With increasing awareness about protecting the environment and pressure from ecologists and environmentalists, the need to cover different aspects of the environment has multiplied. So, it's not surprising 'environmental journalism' has become an important part of mainstream journalism. There has been an increase in the coverage of environmental issues in the past decade. A remarkable amount of research has been conducted on reporting on the environment, by media houses, educational institutions, individuals, NGOs and other groups. Such research has straddled various aspects of the environment.

Ninety-three per cent of the respondents in the survey said they reported on environmental issues as part of daily reporting; only seven per cent had undergone training in environment reporting. The survey found that issues related to policy, agriculture, wildlife, global warming, threats to the environment, pollution, greenery development, resource exploitation, environment crimes, mining and climate change were usually covered by reporters, with articles on pollution and climate change more frequent.

Most reporters said the frequency of publishing or broadcasting stories on the environment was not in their hands, but their organisation did cover such stories whenever relevant. There were those who said their organisations hardly covered environmental issues unless a major event occurred. All respondents agreed that environmental issues should be given priority by media houses. Ten per cent said their media house conducted occasional debates on such issues. All respondents agreed that there should be special awareness and capacity-building sessions on environmental issues. Reporters were willing to undergo training if it was provided by experts. Significantly, despite lacking special skills in reporting on the environment, reporters showed interest in doing stories.

Sixty-four per cent of the respondents consulted an expert every time before filing stories. The popular sources were NGOs, websites, experts and research organisations. Most of the journalists could not recall any particular organisation, such as an NGO or an institution working for environmental issues. Ten per cent of the respondents preferred to have their stories covered on the front page; 65 per cent preferred broadcast during primetime.

The media houses covered by the study ranged from local, regional and national to international. The organisations included print, television and the Internet, and respondents were features in-charge, reporters, freelance journalists, directors, video journalists and programme officers. ■

Effective communication is the key



Kalyan Singh Kothari

During panel discussions on engaging and working with the media during a recent five-day workshop for South Asian countries on strengthening advocacy efforts for promoting family planning, this writer suggested that communication strategies and counseling related to population stabilisation and fertility control must get a new direction, where communication and media are given an important role in promoting the family welfare programme in India. Exposure to family planning messages helps widen the horizon of understanding on issues related to contraceptive use and helps achieve the desired family size. About 40 delegates from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Myanmar agreed that measuring the extent of exposure to such information helps programme managers and planners to effectively target population for information, education and communication activities.

Communication channels such as radio, television, the cultural wing of the government, the directorate of field publicity, the print media and, of course, today's powerful tools such as social media, the Internet and mobile phones can be effectively used to create awareness and promote knowledge related to reproductive health and population control, including family planning. Participants at the workshop felt that knowledge about contraceptives and their use was minimal for both men and women in rural areas, those belonging to the lower income groups, Scheduled Tribes, Muslims and Christians. There is thus a need to extend the frontiers of science and technology to the area of family planning, especially to improve the health of the poor.

Media advocacy, counseling and effective communication in the local language backed by community support can yield significant results, as rightly pointed out by Vineet Sharma, regional advisor, Reproductive Health, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia-Pacific, Bangkok at the inaugural. It was the "unmet need for family planning" (the percentage of women who want to avoid a pregnancy but are not using any kind of contraception. In a state like Himachal Pradesh, it is 14 per cent, while in Bihar it is as high as 37 per cent. Addressing this lag requires a shift in family planning strategies from the present focus on sterilisations to reversible methods like intrauterine contraceptive devices) that was the focus at the workshop. Indeed, married as well as unmarried girls in India could do with better access to family planning services, including information and counseling support. Some suggestions at the workshop:

1. The youth must be engaged in awareness campaigns and provided incentives. Since many of them lack education they must be properly trained.
2. Traditional health care practices and local remedies must be encouraged and the media can chip in with advice from experts. Backed by UNFPA support, the Jan Mangal Couple concept was initiated in Rajasthan in 1992 and later implemented in all the districts in the state.

(The writer is a freelance journalist based in Jaipur. He contributes grassroots news and features to One World South Asia, a web portal. He was special correspondent for Rajasthan Patrika and had worked for UNI.

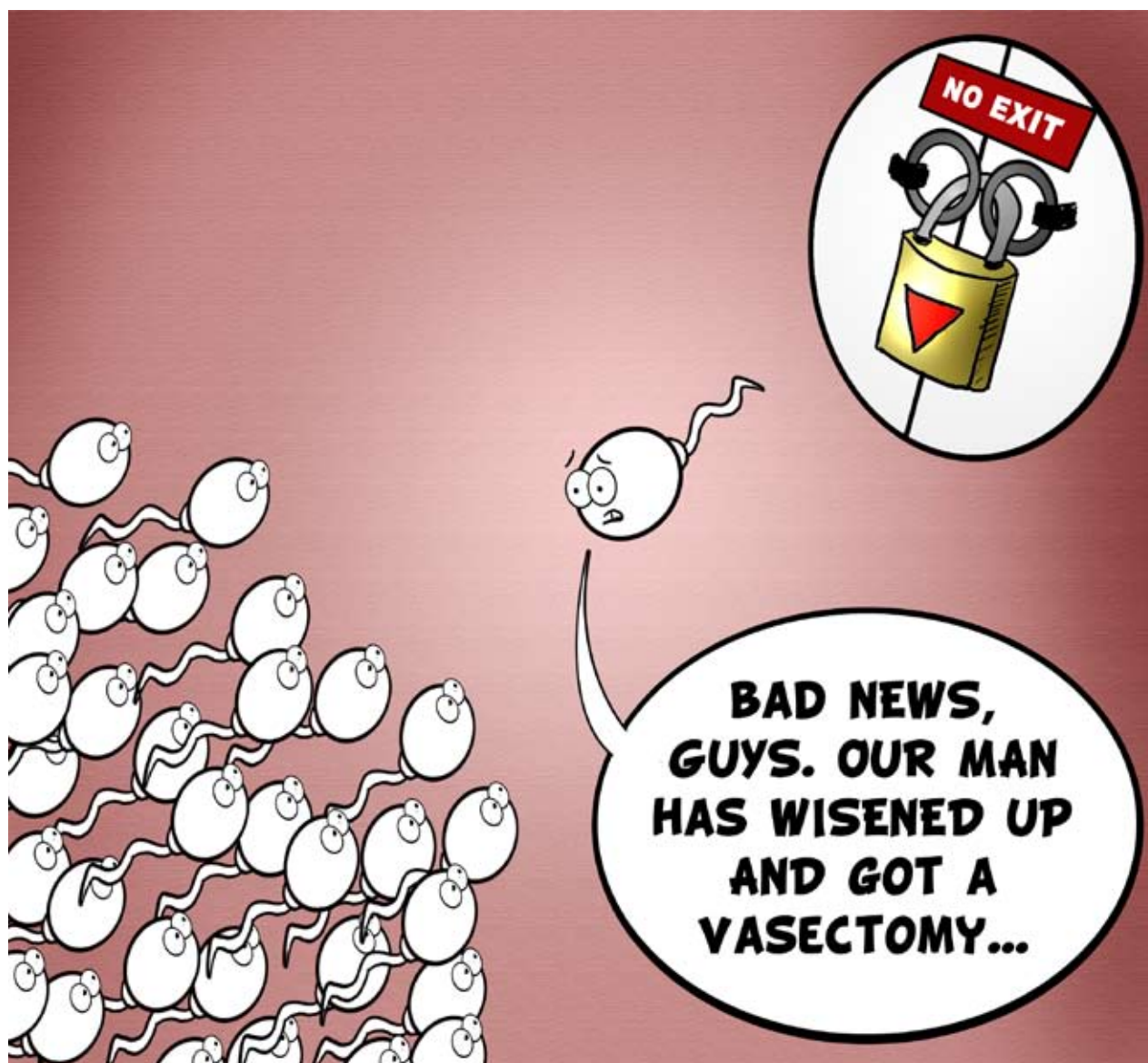


Illustration: Arun Ramkumar

3. The innovative community-based distribution programme of non-clinical contraceptives was adopted by the state government but the media paid scant attention, an example of what should not have been.
4. Compensation for sterilisation to step up family planning services for population stabilisation should be substantially enhanced in at least the focus areas. The Janani Surkhsha Yojana, for

instance, a package for TB and vasectomy for men with up to three children, has shown good results. For such schemes, additional funding facilities should be created when policies are made.

5. Field trips for the media to highlight best practices and success stories are a must.
6. Finally, any good advocacy campaign should have answers to the following: what do we want, who can make it happen, what do they need to hear,

who do they need to hear it from, how can we make sure they hear it, what do we have, what do we need, and how do we tell that it's working. ■

Use children sparingly in advertisements



Manasvi Maheshwari

Children are breaking new ground in advertising. After selling milk drinks, detergents, soaps, hair oil and shampoo, they are now trying to influence big investments at home and in business. Many brands not only target children as consumers but also feature them in their advertisements to attract other consumers. No wonder, therefore, we see an increase in the number of advertisements where children are used as models to promote all sorts of products, even if the product is not meant for them. Advertisers know it helps break monotony and creates an emotional impact. But they shouldn't overdo it

The word 'child' usually brings a smile to your face, no matter what age you are, what your economic status is, or what mood you are in. A child is indeed capable of softening even the toughest person and of course there's no doubt that children bring happiness in our lives. Those in the advertising business understand this and use children in advertisements quite effectively. Children have often been face of advertisements related to milk drinks, chocolates, jam, cough syrups, toothpaste, soaps and such, all products targeted at them. However, in recent times the trend has changed and children now appear in ads that target other consumers as well – for example, those interested in buying air-conditioners, washing machines, cooking oil, home appliances, paints, luxury cars, etc. They are used in social awareness campaigns, too. Worldwide, children are used in product ads, government ads, for social causes, and even for 'no smoking' campaigns.

Such efforts have not only helped in attracting the consumers' attention but also in entertaining them and arousing curiosity about the product or service being advertised. Ever since the emergence of nuclear families in urban areas, activities in a household revolve around the 'young ones' and parents are willing to do anything to keep the children happy.

Why are children featured in advertisements of adult products or services? Well, here are some reasons:

Emotional appeal: Children add the emotional touch to a concept. In many product categories where there is no tangible benefit or differentiator among brands, the decisions are emotionally driven. So, if there is no big difference in features, quality or price, the advertising focuses on the emotional connect. Children bring in elements of honesty, innocence, and true satisfaction.

Role in decision-making: Children influence the purchasing decisions of adults, including parents. So, grabbing adult attention through children is a sound strategy if tailored in a charming and engaging manner. With change in social patterns and lifestyles, a child can influence a young executive who may be a parent.

Prospective consumer: Children have their own purchasing power and they're the adult consumers of the future.

(The writer is assistant professor, Jagannath International Management School, affiliated to the Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi. She has worked in corporate communications with Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages and Sahara India.)



Children are seen in many advertisements nowadays, including for products and services meant for grown-ups. Advertisers are smart enough to cash in on the emotional appeal provided by children. Although children do influence purchase, advertisers would do well to understand that the indiscriminate use of children will invariably lead to brands not conveying the intended message.

Entertainment value:
Simply put, children can make advertisements interesting.

Let's look at some case studies:

1. **Flipkart:** Flipkart ad campaigns have used children in a refreshing manner. For example, children educate consumers about the benefit of shopping on an e-commerce website. Shot in a narrative manner, two TVCs titled Mr Impatient and Mr Forgetful show two children talking like adults about how the entire experience of shopping through Flipkart.com has been a memorable one and how it has brought a little joy in their lives. The e-commerce bit has really nothing to do with children at all; the service is meant for adults. The concept was to build trust and using children helped.

2. **Petroleum Conservation Research Association:** A social

awareness advertisement showed a son telling to his father: "Main bada hoke cycle repair shop kholunga kyunki jis tarah se aap petrol use kar rahe hain mere bada hone tak sab khatam ho jayega (I will open a cycle repair shop when I grow up because the way you are using petrol, there's be nothing left of it then)" An effective ad that immediately struck a chord, a child conveying the message of 'save petrol'.

3. **Surf Excel:** A popular ad campaign 'daag achche hain (stains look good)' by was targeted at women consumers who decide which washing powder to buy. Children provide the emotional appeal and, needless to add, women fall for it.
4. Advertisers must also understand that the indiscriminate use of children will invariably lead to brands not conveying the intended

message. Consumers could get fed up watching children in ads; after all, too much of anything is bad. ■

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Folk media can play a role in development



Kiran Bala

Sophisticated channels of communication in India, such as mobile phones and the Internet, have not been effective at the grassroots where many villages still make do without the basics of life. And even if mass media was accessible to villagers, it's still folk media that plays an important role. It constitutes an integral part of the local culture and, thus, the audience is able to identify itself with the experience, be it music, fantasy, humour, morality, religion or education. Can folk media be used to make developmental initiatives more effective? Perhaps yes, by combining it with modern forms of media

India is home to a fourth of the world's poor, a statistic that makes a mockery of the efficiency of the government's poverty reduction programmes. The National Sample Survey data reveals that more than 220 million Indians survive on less than the equivalent of one dollar a day. According to the UN Children's Fund, India has made substantial progress in specific social indicators, particularly "those that respond to vertical, campaign-like approaches", such as polio eradication and net enrolment in primary schools. However, there is a need for more systematic change in attitudes and infrastructure (for example, the provision of good primary care services), where improvements are almost negligible (Central Statistical Organisation Statistical Abstract India 2003).

To meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals by 2015, the government (under the Food Security Act) has to provide 25 kg rice or wheat a month to families below the poverty line, it has to (under the Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana) focus on integrated development of 1000 villages with a 50 per cent population of Scheduled Castes, strengthen rural infrastructure (Bharat Nirman), make basic healthcare facilities accessible to the rural poor (National Rural Health Mission), and eradicate poverty (National Rural Livelihood Mission). Despite thousands of crores of rupees being spent, the target is far from reach. One of the many reasons is lack of information. The target population is unaware of the developmental programmes.

New communications technologies promise greater efficiency and accuracy in the dissemination of information. But the rural areas of developing countries do not benefit from these advances because of the lack of human and material resources. Conventional media such as radio and television covers some of the areas but 265 million people are still beyond the reach of developmental agencies of the government. Many don't have electricity to run television or to listen to the radio.

In 1954, the Government of India established a Song and Drama Division as an arm of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to convert the wealth of performing arts to developmental communication functions. Since then, an average of 14000 folk performances a year has been conducted at the community level. The division has 800 artists (50 per cent of whom are folk and traditional) and nearly 400 private, registered

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troupes, the latter commissioned to present performances on various development themes. For years, All India Radio in its rural broadcasting has used folk media in the form of a daily programme narrated by conventional characters who convey the typical life and folklore in the rural areas covered by the particular AIR stations.

The first significant international recognition of traditional media in the communication and the development strategies of developing countries came in 1972 when the International Planned Parenthood Federation and UNESCO organised in London a series of meetings on the integrated use of folk and the mass media in family planning communication programmes. The interest generated by the meetings and the continued effort to highlight folk media as effective forms to convey developmental messages resulted in a number of seminars and workshops around the world.

Traditional, intimate

Tradition plays an important role in a creative artistic process particularly in the field of folk performing arts. Folk art is functional and spontaneous. Every village has its relevant music, dance or theatre. The folk performing art has been changing its structure continuously over centuries, modifying itself to the needs of the changing situation and becoming functionally relevant to the society. The folk art forms satisfy our innate need for self-expression, for moral instruction combined with entertainment, and for the dramatic and the lyrical. Indian society is a complex social system with different castes, classes, creeds and tribes. The high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequacies of mass media to reach the majority of people who reside in villages. To many of them, mass media is glamorous,

impersonal and unbelievable, in the context of situations where the villagers could see, hear and touch.

The significance of folk arts in social and political communication was felt and recognised by Jawaharlal Nehru who once said, "I am greatly interested in the development of a people's theatre in India. I think there is a great room for it, provided it is based on the people and their traditions. Otherwise it is likely to function in the air. It is a people's approach. Nevertheless, I think an effort should be made in the direction."

Indian folk forms are a mixture of monologue, dialogue, dance, song, drama, preaching and education. The various folk forms – folk music, folk dances and dramas – are a powerful means of public communication. And they are presented in a lively, creative and innovative manner, in the language of those who are the receivers. Indeed, traditional media has been a significant means of communication in carrying developmental message to the rural folk in the country and has also proved to be immensely useful in influencing human values and attitudes. The role of folk media in educating the illiterates in India is imperative in developmental programmes. According to Shyam Parmar (Traditional Folk Media in India), the advantages of folk media from development perspective are: traditional folk media are most intimate with the masses in all the regions of the country and their primary appeal is to the emotions rather than the intellect; they command an immense variety of forms and themes to suit the communication requirements of the masses; they are local and live and are able to establish direct rapport with the audiences; they are easily available to customers; they are flexible to accommodate new themes; they are enjoyed and approved by all the people from different age groups; and they are

low-cost media as compared to the sophisticated mass media. Local artists use the local languages and dialect to make them more participatory in nature. The content is usually based on local needs, which makes it more interesting for rural folk, and the performances are dramatised in local settings.

The onus of communicating developmental initiatives should also lie with private media players. FM radio and cable TV can be used to create educational and entertaining content for development with the help of folk artists. Street plays, puppet shows and other folk forms can be recorded and broadcast through various forms of mass media. An exclusive channel for folk forms can be launched under the auspices of the Song & Drama Division. The content may be created according to the regional needs of the multilingual states.

In rural India, oral folk music traditions have been used for generations to bring about common understanding and awareness among listeners. J.A. Lent's (Grassroots Renaissance: Folk Media in the Third World) study on folk media in the developing world shows that this can serve as a counter force to the constant flow of urban media to rural domains, empowering and increasing the voice of marginalised communities. Neha Kumar and Tapan S. Parikh's (New Media & Folk Music in Rural India) study reveals that in recent decades the production and dissemination of folk music in India has evolved considerably with the advent of cassettes, CDs, mp3 players and advanced low-cost recording technology. Not only have these changes affected existing listening communities, but folk artists have also been able to use technologies to reach wider and more geographically distributed audiences. ■

The media needs to report with care



Marianne de Nazareth



Prof Nagarathinam

(Marianne de Nazareth now writes on science and the environment. She had earlier worked at the edit desk for Deccan Herald.)

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The conflict between man and elephant seems to be escalating in India. Newspapers carry stories at regular intervals about 'rogue' elephants or about elephants becoming a 'menace'. The bias is out there for all to see and on top of that we often see an inconsistency in reporting on wildlife in newspapers. On some days we see responsible stories, and on other days, even the same newspaper has an inaccurate or sensational story. The reason: the media is not sensitised sufficiently enough on why the man-elephant conflict is occurring and, as a result, the stories are mostly one sided, skewed in favour of man and the elephant is demonised

At the launch of R. Sukumar's latest book, *The Story of Asia's Elephants*, in Bangalore, what was noticeable was the lack of media coverage of the event. The environment and issues on wildlife do not interest most broadsheet media, so attendance by journalists was thin. Girish Karnad, the celebrity chief guest, was the only point of interest, considering Professor Sukumar is one of Asia's foremost authorities on elephants. Whoever was present, just wanted photographs clicked with Karnad holding the book and not the author (he lectures at the Centre for Ecological Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore), who has made it a lifetime of study.

As Karnad himself said at the launch, "I came for the launch because I thought I would get a free book since it costs Rs 3500 after discount. After looking at the book and listening to Professor Sukumar I have decided to buy some copies to gift them to family as the book brings out the fact that the elephant is so much part of our Indian religious culture and we need future generations to remember that."

In response to a question posed by a member of the audience, during the question-answer session, how does the media cover the issue of elephant-human conflict, Prof Sukumar replied very brusquely and briefly, "The media needs to educate itself on the issue and write with care." This is a position that most scientists interviewed by media take. They feel the media views everything scientific with a flippant plan to sensationalise it to make a 'good' story. The media is a wonderful conduit to spread information about the elephant but the professor felt that the media only looked at the man-elephant conflict in terms of it attracting attention and as story would appear only if there was death involved, preferably inflicted by the elephant on man.

Referring to a Karnataka State of Environment report written in 1984-85 by Prof Sukumar, a newspaper report (29th January 1985) had the headline, 'Elephants invade city'. A herd of nine elephants from the Bannarghatta forests had crossed 15 acres of cultivation at night and entered an engineering college in the suburbs of Bangalore. The environment report said this was



A picture seen often in newspapers these days. There are always curious onlookers at tragedies such as this one; in the conflict between man and animal, it is animal that usually suffers. Is the media reporting fairly on such issues? That's the question we need to look at.

not something new and could date back to Gaja-shastras of the 5-6th century BC and other ancient literature. It dates back to the first human settlement in elephant habitation. So, man is the cause of the conflict as we have grown in numbers and settled in what was originally elephant habitation.

How many of us journalists have ever thought of the human elephant conflict in such terms? The fact that the areas which the elephant supposedly raid, were originally part of their habitation and their migration route. It is man who has intruded and that is why they attack, finding us in what was their habitat. We consider man being the only species we should concern ourselves about and if there is conflict and death, it makes a good story as it fits our news values of negativity perfectly.

News values dictate the reasons for which certain stories are selected over others to be published. With regard to how

the stories about human-elephant conflict become news, Galtung and Ruge in their study of news values first published in 1965 presented twelve factors that influence the selection of news and called them news values. The stories of human-elephant conflict are selected by media because they fall under the category of negative news where there is tragedy, loss, death, attacks, and these according to Galtung and Ruge account for one of the twelve news values

Examples of some recent stories in the press, with headlines appearing first, followed by the dateline:

Forest staff, police drive herd of elephants into forests (*The Times of India*, Mysore, February 12, 2012): There seems to be lack of objectivity and loss of accuracy in terms of the language that has been used to describe the incident. The elephants are described as 'raiders' who 'terrorised' the

villagers. There is no mention if the area where they were found is part of their migratory path or their original feeding grounds. The story is skewed in favour of the human species.

Elephant runs amok (*The Hindu*, Kottayam, February 19, 2012): Strong words such as 'runs amok', 'attacked him' and 'tantrums' are used to describe the elephant and sensationalise the story. The report lacks objectivity. Elephants are wild animals; they are not meant to work for humans and so the question of tantrums does not arise.

Tusker scare as festival season sets in (*Deccan Chronicle*, Thiruvananthapuram, January 30, 2012): Words such as 'violent' and 'rampage' appear, describing the animal behaviour. The reporter does mention the elephant was overworked.

Forest dept mulls to put up warning signs on Mysore highway (*The Times of India*, Erode, Jan 29, 2012): It's a balanced story on how the government has plans to put up signs to control speeding vehicles that kill elephants crossing the road.

Will the elephant survive conflict? (*Deccan Herald*, Hassan, December 14, 2012): Environmentalist Sanjay Gubbi takes the 'infotainment' angle by starting with an anecdote to get the reader hooked, useful in producing a balanced and interesting story filled with facts.

Weed invasion causing man-elephant conflict (*Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, September 20, 2012): Here, reasons are based on some research done. ■

A rather lacklustre centenary year



C.S.H.N. Murthy



Oinam Bedajit Meitei

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(Oinam Bedajit Meitei is a research scholar in Film Studies under C.S.H.N. Murthy.)

The lacklustre passing of the centenary year of Indian cinema (1912-2012), the largest film industry in the world, is quite surprising. Cinema is all about glitter (sets, costumes, lights, colors and contrasts) and glamour (aesthetics, heroes and heroines). Indian cinema offered it all aplenty to audiences even before the country gained Independence. Such a powerful and popular medium passing its 100th year silently is a paradox of sorts.

There have been several outstanding achievements for Indian cinema these past decades – emotion-driven family entertainment films, native Indian narratives and genres, unique sound/music scoring based on native classical music traditions, art films and parallel cinema, histrionics of many talented actors/actresses (many of them must be honoured), eminent skills of directors and film technicians, technological improvements from Bolex to Arricam through Mitchell cameras and accessory units, transformation from black-and-white to colour through techno-colour and Eastman colour, worldclass studios and film processing laboratories, latest film trends/investments, cross-cultural and trans-national films. Quite a list.

While Bengali, Malayalam and Kannada cinema contributed more to what is better known as parallel cinema or real-life cinema, the truth is commercial cinema kept attracting the average Indian film-goer. Thousands of wonderful films have come out of the ‘commercial’ stables, many appealing to the human emotion, especially in Hindi and Telugu.

Indian cinema produced its own narratives/genres quite different from the Western films and offered a wonderful spectrum of sound and music design based on native classical musical traditions. Due to the wide range of diversity in Indian culture and common ethos, the film industry has been successful in penetrating into even the remote corners of the country. For instance film such as Devdas (Telugu or Hindi) and the Happy Days (Telugu) have been accepted by the audiences across India despite cultural and linguistic differences. Technologically, Hindi and Telugu film industries vied with each other and today Hyderabad is a hub of film production with all the latest software and hardware necessary for film production. In terms of film theatres as well as studios, Andhra Pradesh has is next to Bombay as a preferred filming location.

There are of course many charming memories Indian films have given us. The great epic films based on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, folk films, fantasy films, diaspora genres, etc have captivated middle-class audiences since the silent era. For instance, old-timers will hardly forget the emotional pairing of Savitri and A.Nageswara Rao of Devdas (1953) and Moogamanasulu (1963) in Telugu. Both the films were later remade in Hindi. Later generations will remember the casting coup – of Dilip Kumar – in Shakti (1982).

The Telugu film industry at the height of commercialism still produced films like Annamayya (1997) and Sri Ramarajyam (2011). Stalwarts such as L.V. Prasad and Rama Naidu invested and produced films in other languages

such as Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Kannada and Oriya, an exercise which Hindi film producers did not dare indulge in. Be it a spy-genre film, a socio-fantasy film or a mythological film, the Telugu film industry always came out tops. Even in terms of applying the latest technology, Telugu films scored, with techno-colour, Eastman colour, cinemascope, Dolby digital stereo and tube technology.

The aspect of 'cross-culturalism' in Indian cinema brings together shared beliefs and experiences. It is applauded by a number of scholars and eminent authors as the most effective medium to communicate social change, next to print and folk media. A number of films starting from Achut Kanya (1936, Hindi), Mala Pilla (1938, Telugu) to Lage Raho Munnabhai (2006, Hindi) and Stalin (2006, Telugu) have had in-built social messages and were acclaimed for their ability to educate the society besides being a source of entertainment. Indian commercial cinema has been mainly mass-centric and thousands of films have contributed to the transformation of social trends.

Though the film industry began its journey in 1912 in India, it was not recognised till the late 1970s as an industry. In fact, the administration in the immediate post-Independence days was quite hostile to the medium of cinema. Despite a number of hurdles, the film industry succeeded in emerging as a powerful force; it is estimated that the film and television industry will grow at 16.5 per cent a year to register revenues of Rs 65850 crore by 2014. Considering such growth, it is not difficult to imagine the contribution of the Indian as well as global audience to Indian cinema. However, it must be said again that the rather lacklustre display of interest by the government to celebrate the medium's 100 years is truly disappointing. ■

Expo reflects transformation

The world's largest trade exhibition for the news publishing and media industry showed a reflection of how newspapers had evolved from print to multimedia, making the vital relationship between publishers and technology suppliers even stronger. The 42nd World Publishing Expo drew more than 260 exhibitors from 30 countries to showcase the technology to publish news in print, on tablets, mobile and online. More than 7000 visitors from more than 83 countries attended. As Jacob Mathew, president of WAN-IFRA, said: "It is an event that thrives on an exchange of ideas among colleagues from all over the world, and is built on the vital partnership of publisher and supplier, something that has deepened and strengthened in these challenging times."

When the Expo began more than four decades ago, "the issues of concern were how to manage colour printing, how to integrate colour pictures into the newspaper economically, and how to handle the new technology of photo typesetting. In short, print and print production-related topics," he said. "Today, successful publishing houses are cross-media operations. They must be equally comfortable working in the digital business as in print. And the Expo reflects our industry's transformation. It is now the leading exhibition for technology to publish news on all platforms, print and digital." ■

Paresh Nath re-elected ILNA president

The Indian Newspaper Languages Association (ILNA) elected its new executive body at its recently held 71st annual general meeting. More than 90 ILNA members from across the country participated. Paresh Nath of Delhi Press has been re-elected as president of ILNA for the third consecutive year. Vijay Bondria has been elected election officer of ILNA. The other members of the ILNA executive body include Ravi Kumar Bishnoi (vice president), Rajshekhar Koti (vice president – South), Deenbandhu Chowdhry (vice president – West), Chandrakant Bhawe (re-elected treasurer), Vivek Gupta, Ankit Bishnoi and Prakash Pohre (secretary general). Included in the board of executives are Anant Nath, Kirti Kahmar, Girish Kumar Agarwal, Devendra Kumar Sharma, Digambar Ganpat Rao Gaikwad and Bharat Bhusan Srivastava. ■

Evolution, imperatives of the regional press



Gurbachan Chandan

(The writer is an accredited press correspondent. He retired as head of the Urdu Desk in the Press Information Bureau, Government of India, New Delhi.)

The Tamil press gave the lowest publicity to Second World War British material issued by its then Bureau of Public Information (BPI), predecessor of the present Central Press Information Bureau of the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi.

The bureau was functioning in India since 1920 but its working left much to be desired.

In 1935, the Imperial British Government passed the Government of India Act granting (limited) provincial autonomy in response to the country's premier political body, the Indian National Congress's long standing demand for "complete independence". The British Government had also decided its BPI. It sent A.H. Joyce, director of Information, India Office, London, to assess the situation and report to the government his findings. Joyce visited India twice. He recommended that BPI be reorganised and placed under a trained journalist. The British Government accepted his recommendations and selected Jessleyn Hennessey from among its professional corps.

Hennessey came to India in September 1937 and took over BPI as its first journalist principal information officer (PIO). Two years after he joined, the Second World War broke out in August 1939. The British Government hastened to dump India in its vortex. The Indian National Congress (INC) under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi protested against it, reiterating its stand that the government must first lay down a roadmap for India's overdue independence.

However, Hennessey was caught unawares about the situation. He had to reorient his work schedule. He was irked to find that BPI until 1939 had no arrangement or publicity sections for a good few India's regional languages. These included even Bengali, the language of Bengal, which provided the British with the key to their conquest of India. It is well known that their first major conquest took place at Plassey in Bengal in 1757, that is 182 years before BPI's discovery (about 1939). It appears that the intelligent Britons could not gather a sound and convincing idea about the language of the place they conquered first.

PIO Hennessey's embarrassment could well be imagined. The report says that with the concurrence of his government, he quietly set up a new Joint Section for Tamil, Gujarati and Bengali for whatever justice the section could provide. It demonstrated government's old antipathy towards India's ancient regional languages. J. Natarajan, who was selected by the government and had joined as the deputy principal information officer (DPIO) during BPI's reorganisation, says in his *History of Indian Journalism* authored in 1955 as the secretary of the first Press Commission something very relevant. He describes the British Government's attitude as under:

"Among the members of the Viceroy's Council in 1876, there were strong supporters of some sort of restriction on the language press, notably Sir Alexander Arbuthnot and Sir Ashley Eden who was then the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. His predecessor, Sir George Campbell had left behind his strongly worded opinion that a more effective law was needed than that

which then existed (viz., Act XXV of 1857 and Section 124A of the Penal Code as amended by the Act XXVII of 1870 by the Government of Great Britain). Mark how the Government of Great Britain merrily knighted these anti-Indian champions."

The dedication to their own language, English, and lack of faith in Indian languages, which they termed as "vernaculars", stood in the way.

Urdu Press

All the same, Jessleyn Hennessey had a heavy load of work at hand. His units reported on a section of the Urdu Press with a limited coverage of Imperial interests with the following data:

Watan, Delhi (879" single column), *Asre Jadid*, Calcutta (519" sc), *Nadeem*, Bhopal (419" sc), *Wahdat*, Delhi (365" sc), *Inquilab*, Lahore (297" sc), *Nizam*, Rampur (204" sc), *Ittehad*, Patna (191" sc), *Tej*, Delhi (185" sc), *Al Kalam*, Bangalore (172" sc), *Mujahid*, Dehra Ismaile Khan (160" sc), *Hayat*, Karachi (119" sc), *Huq*, Lucknow, (78" sc), *Payam*, Hyderabad Deccan (54" sc), *Khilafat*, Bombay (48" sc) and *Al Burhan*, Akola (40" sc).

Of the 15 newspapers above, three (*Inquilab*, *Mujahid* and *Hyat*) belong to Pakistan and are not received here. Of the remaining 12 Indian newspapers, as many as nine are now defunct (*Wattan*, *Asre Jadid*, *Wahdat*, *Ittehad*, *Al Kalam*, *Huq*, *Payam*, *Khilafat* and *Al Burhan*).

Hindi Press

Its response amounted to zero. The report said that the entire press supported the Congress. It "looked upon government war material with suspicion".

Tamil, Bengali and Gujarati Press

Tamil had the lowest score. Only one of its papers, *Hindustan*,

provided space – throughout the year it gave only 2" single-column space. The second lowest was Bengali, *Chabuk*, which gave 25" sc and the third lowest was Gujarati. Its one paper, *Sind Sewak*, gave only 36" sc space throughout the year (1940).

Indeed, the difficulties of Jessleyn Hennessey were numerous. In the initial stages of the War, the international situation was vastly pro-Germany. German forces were winning and advancing. Up to the summer of 1940, they had won Norway, Holland, Belgium and Dunkirk. Even France and Italy had announced their support to the Axis Powers. The German Radio Service was broadcasting hot and alarming news. Its predictions were generally pocketed by the people in my area. This humble scribe personally witnessed the rising hysteria there. In my town, Lahore, capital of West Punjab, which a little later expectedly went to Punjab, the masses were too terrified. They thronged government post offices and banks to withdraw their deposits.

Hennessey, however, concentrated on his appointed task. He was much encouraged by the response to his material from a section of the Urdu Press. With the consent of government, he started a new Muslim News Service, containing views and pictures of Islamic interests. The Muslims Haj programme was copiously covered. A special mailing list was drawn for this service. Among its contributors were Sir Zafar Ullah Khan, Dr A. Yusuf Ali, Sardar Iqbal Ali Shah, Dr Shusht and Kainth Williams, presumably orientalist. BPI thus made Urdu a Muslim language and the Urdu Press as an Islamic activity for its ad hoc purposes.

Need for Language Press Commission

The resentful experience of the

erstwhile British Government and its BPI regarding India's popular languages should be an eye-opener for the present successor Republican Government which had earlier during the British regime rejected the Second Press Commission's proposal favouring appointment of a Newspaper Development Commission (NDC) for the express benefits of language newspapers. Protesting against the former Indian Government, a member of that Commission, N.V. Gadgil had tendered a note of dissent and had also resigned.

A UNI (United News of India) story of 30.12.2011 about the latest data related to the Indian Press confirms the supremacy of Hindi newspapers and periodicals over the contemporary English Press. The dominance has continued for more than two decades. The Urdu daily, *Rashtriya Sahara*, New Delhi of 31.12.2011, on Page 3, under a five-column banner, prominently published the story.

The rejection by the then Government of India of the Second Press Commission's NDC betrayed a lukewarm response to the language press, about a quarter century ago. It is time to appoint a Language Press Commission (LPC) now, which should, inter alia, recommend ways to reform and adapt modern technologies introduced earlier in the Western countries. With the help of the recommendations of the proposed LPC, free India can, legitimately and creditably, update its 22 constitutional languages, besides English. The English language was given 15 adjustable years in our original Constitution of 26.1.1950. The National Constitution had favoured Hindi as the official and national language of the country. Subsequent events, particularly the results of the state assembly elections, had upheld the original Constitution standpoint.

Attention is invited to the I&B Ministry's economic adviser, B. Brahma's incisive analysis, which was published as the preamble to RNI's 51st Annual Report (2006-7). It is significant and directly relevant even today. In his broad findings, he said:

"The readership of newspapers in India is growing and the statistics (given in the newspaper publishers mandatory statements formally submitted to RNI) revealed that Indian people prefer their regional language newspapers."

In his 19000-word detailed analysis, he added:

"the question arises as to how to capture the growth potentialities (of the regional press) and sustain its momentum in making policy issues regarding registration of titles, blocking and de-blocking of titles, verification of (their) circulation claims and also the issues of foreign direct investments, etc."

All these and other related issues would hopefully be answered by the proposed LPC. All supporters of the regional languages will welcome the Government of India initiating and expediting the reforms in this arena. Every government representative professes and believes the regional press to be an important part of the Fourth Estate, the fourth vital pillar of the edifice of the state. Governments all over the world leave no stone unturned to strengthen and consolidate all the four pillars. One is looking forward to our government help the important and ever-growing regional press to become modern and widely translate, inspire and involve the citizens through their respective spoken languages in the emerging India's great story. ■

Chinese press freedom violations condemned

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum have condemned Chinese censorship in a case that has provoked a rare show of public protest in support of press freedom in China. The global press organisations called on the Chinese authorities to "end the culture of state censorship" that frequently targets critical publications and stifles freedom of expression.

On 3 January 2013, state censors blocked publication of a pro-reform editorial in the Guangdong-based *Southern Weekly* newspaper. The title – one of the most outspoken in China – was due to run with an article calling for the realisation of a "dream of constitutionalism in China" to protect people's rights. Censors replaced the article without the knowledge of the paper's editors, a move which provoked unprecedented public demonstrations and strike action by journalists in support of freedom of expression. While the strike ended after censors agreed to refrain from any future meddling in the paper's editorial line, it remains to be seen just how long lasting such concessions will be.

In a separate incident, WAN-IFRA urged Chinese authorities to hasten the accreditation process involving foreign journalists after *New York Times* correspondent Chris Buckley was forced to leave mainland China after a three-and-a-half-month delay in processing his journalistic credentials. No explanation was given for the delay, although concerns have been raised that it might be in response to recent articles in the *New York Times* concerning Premier Wen Jiabao and his family. *New York Times* bureau chief Philip Pan has also been waiting for more than nine months for his accreditation, while a further 20 foreign correspondents have experienced similar delays in recent months. "Chinese authorities must ensure timely delivery of accreditations, particularly ahead of what is set to be an import year of political transition," said WAN-IFRA Press Freedom Director, Alison Meston. ■

New appointees at Dainik Bhaskar

The Dainik Bhaskar Group has appointed Pradeep Dwivedi as chief corporate sales and marketing officer. Dwivedi will be based out of Mumbai and will report to Sudhir Agarwal, managing director, DB Corp. Meanwhile, Prasoon Pandey has been elevated as head of Media and Investor Relations, Dainik Bhaskar Group. Dwivedi will be responsible for overall sales revenues and will be leading nationwide corporate sales for the group publications. He will also be responsible for trade marketing and establishing the brand amongst the corporate market and will be the Bhaskar representative at industry and government forums. Pandey has been with the group for the last six years. ■

From commercial to social causes



Mrinal Chatterjee

(The author, a journalist-turned-media academician, presently heads the Eastern India campus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication located in Dhenkanal, Odisha. Besides teaching communication he also writes columns and fiction. This article is the fourth in a series on the history of regional language journalism in India. The ones on Bengali, Urdu and Hindi journalism have appeared in previous issues.)

A characteristic feature of early Gujarati journalism was the interest shown in commercial news, marketing and trading. The earliest Gujarati journal was a weekly, *Mumbaina Samachar*, founded by Parsi priest Furdonji Murzban in Bombay in 1822 with 150 subscribers – a promising start for those days. Its main object was stated to be to publish market rates and serve the business community. Unlike many other newspapers of the period, it had “a full-fledged printing press complete with types”¹. It was converted into a daily and renamed *Bombay Samachar* in 1832.

In 1830, the *Mumbai Vartman* was launched by Naoroji Dorabji Chandaru. After a year, it developed into a bi-weekly with

the extended title of *Mumbaina Halkaru Ane Vartaman*. It remained in publication for 13 years, and closed down in 1843. *Jam-e-Jamshed*, a weekly, was published by Pestonji Manekji in 1831. It became a daily in 1853 and was popular among the Parsis. Other newspapers which came out between 1832 and 1854 included *Doorbin*, *Mombaina Kasud*, *Samachar Durpan*, *Chitranjan Darpan* and *Chabuk*; none could exist beyond 1856.

Interestingly, an English magistrate, Sir Alexander Kinlock Forbes, took a leading role in the development of Gujarati journalism in Ahmedabad and Surat. He helped the Gujarat Vernacular Society of Ahmedabad to launch the *Vartaman* in 1849. It was edited by an employee of the society. Another interesting aspect about early Gujarati journalism was: it was divided in two sections, Hindu and Parsi. The first Parsi newspaper, *Bombay Samachar*, started with an up-to-date printing press; the *Vartaman* was lithographed. The newspapers of each community took up the question of reform within that community. *Bombay Samachar*, however was an exception, which opened its doors to everyone without distinction.

Forbes also promoted a bi-weekly *Surat Samachar*, in Surat in 1850 which, however, had only a brief existence. Surat had a journal devoted to prohibition, the *Parhejghar*. In 1854, Lallubhai Raichand started the *Shamasher Bahadur* in Ahmedabad. Dadabhai Naoroji's started *Rast Gofar*



Dadabhai Naoroji Dorabji, who started the Mumbai Bartaman.

Photos: Mrinal Chatterjee

1. History of Indian Journalism, J Natarajan, p-69, Publications Devision, Delhi, July 2000.



Front pages of the Navjivan, Divya Bhaskar and Mumbai Samachar, Navjivan had great influence on Gujarati journalism.

(which means truth-speaker) in 1851, whose mission was to work for social reform. It continued publication till 1921.

The *Hitechu* was the first Gujarati daily. It was started as a bi-weekly in 1861; it was converted into a daily in 1873. It rendered great public service during the 40 years of its life. The Gujarati press was divided into the Hindu and Parsi sections and there was no love lost between the two. Anxious to stem the rot which had set in, some adventurous young men started papers with high ideals and principles; one of them was *Prajabandhu*, which was first published in 1895. Also belonging to this category was *Gujarati Punch*. The *Kheda Vartman*, a weekly, started in Kaira in 1861, celebrated its centenary in 1961. The *Sanj Varman* of Bombay (1902) was an influential evening paper. Sorabji Palonji Kapadia was the editor of *Sanj Varman* for a long time. It stopped publication in 1950.

As Gandhi's birthplace and the scene of the celebrated Salt March of 1930, Gujarat generated

a press even more influenced by nationalist causes than elsewhere. Gandhi took over the *Navjivan* from Indulal Yajnik and converted it from a monthly into a weekly from Ahmadabad in 1919 at the time he broke into India's national politics. *Navjivan* had great influence on Gujarati journalism. In 1919, its circulation was 9000 and the following year it jumped to 20000. It was renamed *Harijan Bandhu* in 1932 and Chandrasekhar Premshankar Shukla became its editor. It stopped publication in 1940 and after revival in 1946 continued for two years. The Gujarati press played a significant part in the freedom struggle and lent powerful support to Gandhi in the non-cooperation and constructive programmes.

Among the doyens in Gujarati journalism, mention must be made of Amritlal Seth, who formed the Saurashtra Trust in 1931 and launched the Gujarati Daily *Janmabhoomi* on 9th June 1934 in Bombay. Samaldas Gandhi, another great name, was its editor. Samaldas Gandhi and his associates

left *Janmabhoomi* after some time and started *Vande Mataram* and a war of words developed between the two papers. Amritlal Seth founded the Indian Languages Newspapers Association and organised a cooperative society to help finance needy Gujarati papers. *Janmabhoomi* grew into a media group² which by 2011 published several publications including *Pravasi Weekly*, *Vyapar*, *Phulchhab*, *Kutchmitra*, and a literary magazine, *Kavita*.

Among other distinguished journalists were Lchcharam Suryarm Desai, Sarabji Kapadia, Natwarlal I. Desai Ravishankar Mehta, K. M. Munshi and Kapilraj Mehta. Ahmedabad had no Gujarati daily paper till 1921. The first Gujarati daily from Ahmedabad was *Swarajya* with Nandilal Bodiwala as editor but it did not live for long. Bodiwala started an evening paper, *Sandesh*, with which *Ahmedabad Samachar*, a rival, was merged later. It became a morning daily in 1943. By 1958, Chimanbhai Patel was at the helm of affairs. His unique

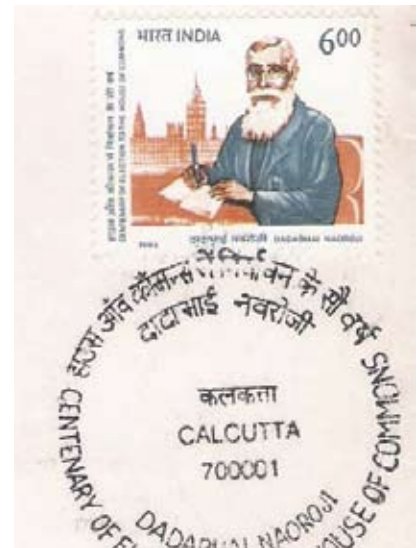
2. <http://www.janmabhoominewspapers.com/About.aspx>

contribution to journalism was the *Sunday Sanskar Poorti* in Gujarati, which included many celebrities as columnists. He thus pioneered Sunday supplements in Gujarati journalism. Until 1984, *Sandesh* was a single-edition newspaper published from Ahmedabad. Then, under an expansion programme, new editions were launched in Baroda, Surat, Rajkot and Bhavnagar in 1985, 1989, 1990 and 1998, respectively.

Another group which published a number of Gujarati papers is Lok Prakashan. It had several publications including the *Gujarat Samachar*³, a daily initially published from Ahmedabad in late 1940s; weekly *Prajabandhu*

and evening daily *Loknad*.

Gujarat did not have an English daily for a long time after Independence until the national dailies, *Times of India* and the *Indian Express*, brought out their editions from Ahmedabad. Another interesting feature of Gujarati journalism was: until the creation of a separate state of Gujarat in 1960, Mumbai was as much a centre of Gujarati publications as Ahmedabad. Indeed, in the early 1960s, the largest Gujarati daily newspaper *Bombay Samachar* continued to be published from Mumbai. After the state of Gujarat was created, however, the focus of Gujarati life turned increasingly towards Ahmedabad and the



Indian Post honoured the man who wielded influence in the early years of Gujarati journalism: Dadabhai Naoroji.



The Gujarat Sandesh was one of the five most-read Gujarati dailies.

provincial towns of the new state.

At the end of 1984, there were 43 dailies in Gujarati out of a total of 735 publications. By 2007-08, according to the figures given by the Registrar of Newspaper of India, the number of publications went up to 3005, of which 220 were dailies and 1410 were weeklies. According to the Indian Readership Survey 2011 Q2, the five most read Gujarati dailies were *Gujarat Samachar* (readership: 44.44 lakh)⁴, *Divya Bhaskar*⁵ (35.36 lakh), *Gujarat Sandesh*⁶ (33.29 lakh), *Saurashtra Samachar*⁷ (2.3 lakh) and *Gujarat Mitra*⁸ (1.76 lakh).

3.<http://www.gujaratsamachar.com/>

4. Founded in the late 1940s, published from Ahmedabad. Editions from Ahmedabad, Vadodara (Baroda), Surat, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Mumbai and New York. Owned by the Lok Prakashan Ltd Group. Publisher: Shreyansh Shantilal Shah.

5. Dainik Bhaskar Group's Gujarati daily. Published by the Bhaskar Group. Launched in 2003. Has a North American edition for NRIs in Gujarati. Published from Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot. Sections are National, International, Sport, Business, and Mumbai. City supplements for Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot, Uttar Gujarat, Dakshin Gujarat, Madhya Gujarat, Kutch, Saurashtra. Magazines are *Woman Bhaskar*, *Bal Bhaskar*, *Dharma Darshan*, *Utsav*, *Aha! Zindagi*. It has a literary supplement with features like *Navalkatha*, *Navalika*, *Gazal ane Kavitha*, *Kahaveto*, *Hasya Lekh*.

6. In 1923, Nandlal Bodiwala started the *Sandesh* daily. It grew phenomenally after Chimanbhai Patel took over in 1958. By 2011, it had five editions. Chimanbhai died in 1995 and his son Falgunbhai Patel took over as editor and CMD. <http://www.sandesh.com/footer.aspx?page=About%20Us>

7. On September 01, 2004 the Dainik Bhaskar Group took over Gujarati daily *Saurashtra Samachar*, Bhavnagar.

8. Established in 1863, the *Gujaratmitra* is one of the oldest newspapers in the country. A bi-weekly named *Gujaratdarpan* was amalgamated in 1894 with the *Gujaratmitra* and the paper is known as *Gujaratmitra & Gujaratdarpan*. Initially started as a weekly, the paper was converted into a daily in 1936. Uttamram Reshamwala joined it as sub-editor in 1898. In 1920, he took over the paper from the Parsee owner. Since then *Gujaratmitra* belongs to the Reshamwala family. In 1937, Pravinkant, the younger son of Uttamram Reshamwala took over the reins of the newspaper at the age of 19 on the sudden and untimely demise of his elder brother, Champaklal. After him, Pravinkant Reshamwala nurtured the paper on a sound footing. After Pravinkant's demise in 1983, his son Bharat Reshamwala has been at the helm of affairs. <http://www.gujaratmitra.in/web/Aboutus/tabid/238/Default.aspx>

GUJARAT SAMACHAR

Volume 37, No. 43 16th March to 20th March 2009

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Gujarat Samachar from the Lok Prakashan stable was initially published from Ahmedabad.

Radio

By mid 2011, there were about 10 All India Radio stations, a dozen private FM stations, 4 campus radio stations and one community radio stations in Gujarat. Among the private FM stations were Radio City, Red FM, My FM, Radio One and Big FM. Among the campus radio stations were Micavaani (Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad), Gujarat University Community

Radio, Ahmadabad and Vallabh Vidyanagar Campus Radio run by A.J. Kidwai Mass Communication and Research Centre, Sardar Patel University, Anand. Among the community radio stations were Rudi no Radio (Self Employed Women's Association / SEWA) in Sanand.

Television

Gujarat was the first state in India where the rural high frequency TV

transmitter was established in 1975 at village Pij of Kheda District. A 2011 report showed Gujarat having 4-5 million C&S (Cable and Satellite) homes. Like in other states, it was Doordarshan which brought television to Gujarat. At present, besides the channels of Doordarshan (DD Girnar, DD Gujarat), several private news channels have cropped up in Gujarat. Among them are ETV Gujarati, P7 News, TV 9 Gujarati, Bizz News, VTV⁹, Sandesh News, et al. Gujarat Samachar launched GSTV News & Views Channel, a 24X7 news and current affairs channel in Gujarati with a mix of Hindi on December 2012. NaMo TV, an initiative of Gujarat BJP (apparently named after Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi) was launched on October 4, 2012 a day after the announcement of the assembly election schedule in the state, only to be shut the next day, pending clearances. Next week, the poll panel cleared the channel to go on air but put certain conditions to monitor political advertisements and possible paid news during the election period. As per media reports,¹⁰ for the network, the BJP has partnered with five local Gujarati satellite channels which will broadcast the same content.

New Media

By end-2012, almost all the leading newspapers and television channels of Gujarat had websites. Several newspapers were available on the Internet in e-paper format. Several service providers were disseminating news on the mobile platform. There were many Gujarat-centric and Gujarati community centric websites to cater to the large Gujarati Diaspora spread all over the world.

9. www.vtvgujarati.com. It was launched on August 15, 2011. It is a Gujarati News Channel with HD Technology. Its programmes are watched in several countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and in Australia.

10. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/gujarat-bjps-namo-tv-back-on-air/1017923>

The words we choose



Nirmaldasan

(Nirmaldasan is the pen name of N. Watson Solomon, an independent communication consultant. He is the creator of a readability formula called the Strain Index. He blogs at Readability Monitor, is founder-editor of the Journalism Online newsletter and secretary, Indian Online Media Forum, Chennai.)

A writer who thinks and feels is a writer who knows words that engage the reader. John Ayto, in his introduction to the *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins*, tells us that the average English speaker knows about 50000 words. If the print and the broadcast media function within this vocabulary-range, readership and rating points are sure to increase. But unfamiliar words have the potency to turnoff the audience.

Edward Thorndike found that there was a relationship between familiarity and frequency. He spent about a decade preparing *The Teacher's Word Book* (1921) of 10000 words. "The list," he writes, "makes it much easier than it has been in the past to put standards for word knowledge, by grades, by ages, or by mental ages, into clear, definite comprehensible form. For example, we may say that at a certain mental age or grade the minimum standard should be knowledge of the meanings of 95 per cent of the first 2500 words, 80 per cent of the next 1000, 60 per cent of the next 1500, and 20 per cent of the next 5000." This list he expanded to 30000 words in 1944, teaming up with Irving Lorge.

Alfred Lewerenz discovered an unusual pattern in the frequency of words. In *Proposals For British Readability Measures*, Harry McLaughlin writes about him: "I have always had a soft spot in my heart for the genius who predicted readability from the percentages of words beginning *w*, *h* or *b* (which he considered easy) and of words beginning *i* or *e* (considered hard)." George Johnson, in *An Objective Method Of Determining Reading Difficulty*, writes: "Alfred S. Lewerenz reported a study made by the Educational Research Division of the Los Angeles Public Schools. By comparing the number of different words beginning with each letter of the alphabet in a given selection with that of the standard provided by *Webster's Elementary School Dictionary*, five critical letters were selected as indicators of reading difficulty. Words beginning with W, H, and B were found frequently in easy material while there were comparatively few beginning with I and E. With difficult reading material the situation was reversed."

Edgar Dale compiled a list of 3000 words, familiar to 80 percent of 4th graders in the US. The list was revised in 1983 and is a factor in the new Dale-Chall readability formula of 1995. Notable among other lists are the *Oxford 3000* and *Voice of America's Special English Word Book*. The *Oxford 3000* also includes some important and familiar words that are not frequent.

Zipf's law

George Kingsley Zipf was also interested in word frequencies. Two of his books are *The Psycho-biology Of Language* (1935) and *Human Behaviour And The Principle Of Least Effort: An Introduction To Human Ecology* (1949). He observed that words of high frequency were usually short or became shorter with frequent use (e.g. *bicycle* to *bike*; *omnibus* to *bus*; *cafeteria* to *cafe*). Moreover, what is called Zipf's law states that the frequency of a word in a corpus is inversely proportional to its rank. The frequency of the top-ranked word is twice that of the second-ranked word, thrice that of the third-ranked word and so on.

Since there is a strong correlation between frequency and the length of words, it has become easier for writers to identify words that are familiar to most of their readers. The length of a word may be measured in characters or syllables. The Raygor Estimate Graph of Alton L. Raygor (1977) considers

words of six or more characters difficult; the SMOG Grading of Harry McLaughlin (1969) counts polysyllables as a marker of reading difficulty. My research, presented in Readability Monitor, suggests the following measures: reading factor for print and the listening factor for broadcast.

Broadcast Listening Factor

Let P3 be the number of polysyllables in three sentences of a broadcast copy. The Broadcast Listening Factor (BLF) = $P3$. The lower the score, the higher the listenability. A score of zero means that the story is very easy and a score of 10+ means that it is very hard. We will get a better estimate if we take 10 samples of three sentences each from various parts of the copy and calculate listenability. If we take just one long sample of 30 sentences, then the BLF = $P30/10$.

Newspaper Reading Factor

I have argued elsewhere that the average syllable has three letters; and so a polysyllable may have nine letters or more. So a long word is one that has more than eight letters.

The number of long words other than the names of persons and places in five sentences may be called the Newspaper Reading Factor. Names of persons and places are exempted from the count as they are usually supposed to be very easy to understand. This formula measures newspaper texts on a five-point scale: 0 – 4 (very easy); 5 – 8 (easy); 9 – 12 (standard); 13 – 16 (hard); and 17+ (very hard). ■

A breath of fresh air for film enthusiasts

An annual festival in a town like Siliguri in the foothills of the Terai forests and mountains came like a breath of fresh air for cinema enthusiasts interested in a different kind of cinema. The 3rd Siliguri International Short & Documentary Film Festival held in October last year featured 42 short features and documentaries over the three days at Ramkinkar Hall, Siliguri.

Though almost every single film had an original subject chosen for exploration, few could really make an impression on the members of the jury. Some just stuck on a given subject such as street dogs in Pathakukurer Panchali (documentary) by Basanta Burman, or One Fine Night (fiction) directed by A. Triloknath. It was shocking that some filmmakers did not bother about post-production or even watching the final print, if there was one. Lok Prakash's Are We So Different? is about a small group of gay men who talk about their marginalisation and their alternative sexual preferences and lifestyles but repetition dragged the footage to make an impact. 110002 named after a Delhi postal code was a strong contender for objectively narrating the pain of parents whose children have gone missing and never returned. But it lost out to Ruptured Spring. Chauthullal, directed by Salil Lal Ahmed, within its short span of 28 minutes, narrates the moving tale of a mother and son exploring the fragile topic of euthanasia or mercy-killing within a village framework.

The top award for the best documentary went to Haobam Paban Kumar's *Ruptured Spring* that highlights the lives of the children of Manipur, who get very little assistance from government-sponsored orphanages. The 17-minute-long documentary depicts the children of the state bearing the brunt of the law and order situation, child labour, children living with HIV/AIDS and the other issues affecting children at present.

Raja Shabir Khan's *Angels of Troubled Paradise* received a high commendation for its in-depth and time-based exploration of the conflict in Kashmir seen from a completely different perspective. Tracking the everyday life of a young teenager, Aadil, who lives in Srinagar, the film follows his life based on an occupation no civilian in the rest of India can even dream of. Aadil is the sole earning member of a very poor family who collects shells (for explosives) from different places in the city and sells them as scrap to the scrap dealers to eke out a living.

The festival was organised by the Siliguri Cine Society in association with Department of I & CA, Govt of West Bengal, Department of North Bengal Development, Siliguri Municipal Corporation, FFSI and Dinabandhu Mancha Advisory Committee. ■

Shoma A. Chatterji

(The writer is a freelance journalist, author and film scholar based in Kolkata.)

REMEMBERING SUNIL GANGOPADHYAY

Poet-writer who vividly portrayed a culture

It is difficult to write a tribute about a person you have known personally, so personally, that 'professional contact' such as an interview would have sort of violated the normalcy of the relationship. My late mother Sumita Gangopadhyay, who began to write poetry at the age of 50, gate-crashed into his earlier home in Calcutta to show him her poems. This was way back in 1971. Sunil Gangopadhyay was very famous then too, but not as affluent as he later became. Swati, his wife, was friendly and informal and son Shouvik was just a kid getting used to his father's fame. Maa once took me to his flat under the Dhakuria fly-over near Dakshinapan Shopping Complex.

Sunil Gangopadhyay was simply Sunil to my mother and became Sunil-da for me, who readily agreed to write the preface to my mother's first poetry collection in 1974. "Please copy your mother's poems before she gives them to me," he once said because my mother wrote a very bad hand. I did. He was then taking care of all the poetry in *Desh*, the Bengali literary journal from the ABP Group. When his little magazine, *Krittibas*, was published, Maa was a subscriber and I would practically devour everything that was published in the form of fiction because I have never been a poetry person. Later, we were taken by pleasant surprise when, in a short story, he mentioned his visit to my parents' Shivaji Park home in Mumbai and a Mona Lisa interpretation



Sketch: Parama

An arresting portrait of Sunil Gangopadhyay.

by my painter brother Anando my mother had sent him as a gift. The painting hung on the wall of their living room in the spacious apartment but disappeared with time when famous painters' works took its place.

I missed Sunil-da the day he visited my parents but Maa tried to make up by introducing us at the centenary celebrations of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay at Mumbai's Rang Bhavan the same week. I tried to touch his feet in reverence but he would not let me. He did not allow anyone to touch his feet. His humility was not only surprising, it was also confusing. It is difficult for a Bengali intellectual as celebrated across the world as Sunil Gangopadhyay to wander about freely without wearing that imaginary halo of greatness around his graying head. When asked to comment on some claims on censoring television programmes, tongue firmly in cheek, he asked, "Do they want the serials to be dipped in Dettol and then put on display?"

I visited his new apartment in a new skyscraper when the Gangulys shifted there. You could get a bird's eye view of the streets below from the balcony. Sunil-da would be inside his study, rarely coming out to receive a guest or a writer. Somehow, when I became a full-fledged journalist, the thought of interviewing him did not occur; firstly, because I felt he would laugh it away and secondly, I was too awestruck in his presence. He was one of my two favourite Bengali authors and still is. I would meet him at film screenings and literary functions and would exchange a few pleasantries but the warmth faded after my mother passed away in 2001.

Last year, we met at a literary conference in an academic institution where as president of the Sahitya Akademi he was the chief guest and I was among the speakers. He was surprised when he saw the 'Dr' before my name

and asked me whether I had given up journalism and taken on research. He smiled when I said 'no' because journalism pays but research does not. A few months later, he sat beside me at the 75th anniversary celebrations of a reputed publishing house in Kolkata. We shared a few pleasantries and he made an observation that struck me hard. "Most of us today choose to have just one child. Has it occurred to anyone that this implies the disappearance of the entire clan of aunts and uncles and cousins etc from the framework of the Indian family? The urban Indian family is becoming atomised in its attempt to become nuclear." He has an only child who also has an only child. I too have an only child who has an only child. He was drawing from his immediate experience and how right he was! It was also an occasion that for me, turned into a priceless memory.

When I complained to Sunil-da that my translated short stories of Sirsendu Mukhopadhyay were lying without being published because the commissioning publisher had backed out of the project, he gave me a name and an address to contact at the Akademi for a proposal. Ironically, I got a positive response a few days after he passed away.

I felt I blessed when I was asked by the Sahitya Akademi to translate from the original Bengali, Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Introduction to Short Story Compilations in Bengali*, Volume 4. I was awestruck by his analysis of the writings of contemporary Bengali writers slightly younger than him, not only because he had chosen them himself for the compilation, but the fact that he had explored their works in minute detail one does not generally expect from a writer as prolific and as famous as he is.

I quote from the first paragraph of the introduction:

Young and noted writers in Bengali literature, who have now crossed middle-age, were born a little before or after India's Independence. The fearful 1940s, the Bengal Famine, the fear of war, communal killings and Partition were events they had not experienced directly. They opened their eyes in a free country, a freedom wrapped with wonderful dreams and hopes for the future: that the country would be shaped anew, and India will once again take the best seat in the world court. All smugglers and bootleggers would be hung from street lamp posts, the people of the nation would not be fragmented by caste divisions, the gap between the rich and the poor would narrow, and every citizen would have equal opportunity to education and good health. Alas! Children of this period did not see their days fringed with gold. All they saw were signs of despair and hopelessness scattered around. The flow of refugees was ceaseless, forcing millions of families to take shelter on pavements, on railway platforms, and under trees. Values began to break down, and undeclared famine in villages stood out in sharp relief. Instead of being punished, smugglers, bootleggers and traffickers became more powerful and now strut about in public with puffed up chests. Perhaps children of middle-class and low-middle class families during the 1950s and 1960s did not experience starvation and did not need to live off rice starch and boiled potatoes. But their hearts filled up with the most tragic pain for the young - the pain of dashed hopes.

It was a short story that introduced me to his writings nearly 40 years ago. It was about a young man the writer meets in a German town he knew back home. The guy who came to Germany with high hopes of making it big has failed in every sense but cannot go back because he does

not have the money to go back and, more importantly, he cannot show his family what a failure he is. This was a completely new perspective on Indians going abroad with dreams nourished through youth only to be dashed in the real world. In another novel, *Chhobighare Ondhokaar*, he writes about people squatting outside a small, cinema theatre in Calcutta that had pulled down its shutters leaving the staff unemployed. It moves on to other areas to spell out a poignant story of love, betrayal, the pain of joblessness and rising poverty within a Bengali family. Once, during one of my rare visits with Maa to his new apartment, he gifted me a novel and signed on the first page. The novel, *Megh, Rode, Brishti*, was a delicate, moving triangular love story that has an unexpected climax that focusses on the fickleness of beauty juxtaposed against the permanence of a deep love that grows with time. This was made into a Malayalam film, *Arike*, earlier this year. The same director Shyamaprasad had made another film, *Oru Kadal* (2007), based on Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Heerok Deepti*.

Sunil Gangopadhyay -- a poet, novelist, short-story writer, journalist and columnist -- was born in Bangladesh's Faridpur District on September 7, 1934. He left for Calcutta along with his family at the age of four and did his master's from Calcutta University in 1954. His first poetry collection, *Eka O Koyekjon*, hit the stalls in 1958 and his first novel, *Atmaprakash*, followed after eight years. There was no looking back thereafter.

As a creative writer, he began with poetry but extended himself to fiction, both short and long, non-fiction, serious essays and even film scripts. He jointly did the script for Gautam Ghose's *Dekha* based on his story. He acquired several identities through pseudonyms chosen with care to identify with different genres of



Sunil Gangopadhyay in more recent times.

creative writing he became famous for. But the pseudonyms were transparent and were designed to be so. We knew that Neellohit was his pen-name for his travelogue writings filled with a lot of satire, fun and so on. The protagonist was a good-for-nothing young man who wandered around aimlessly, without growing roots, lying through his thick head of hair and moving away when he wanted to. Another pen-name he invented for a regular column was Sanatan Pathak which was a double-edged name. It stood for any Bengali proper name. At the same time, it translated as 'the eternal reader.' Neel Upadhyay, somewhat lesser known, was another pseudonym.

Neera is a character he created for a major segment of his poetry that intrigued his readers who wanted to know who Neera was. He would answer with a smile but not say who she was. Neera was his dream woman, a will-o-the-wisp who slipped away each time one felt she was within one's grasp. His relationship with cinema was no less glorious minus a few hiccups that every writer must face never mind his genius. Among the internationally celebrated films based on his writings are Satyajit Ray's *Pratidwandi* and *Aranyer Din Ratri*, Subrata Sen's *Hathat*

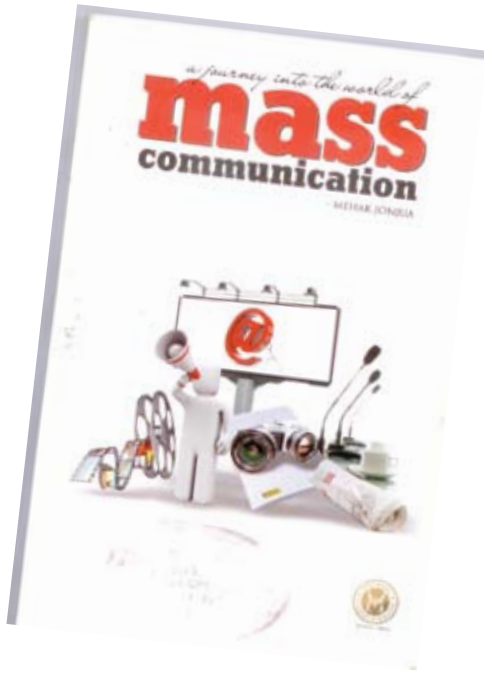
Neerar Jonne, Anjan Das' *Swarger Neechey Manush*, Gautam Ghose's *Dekha* and *Moner Manush* and Aniruddha Roy Choudhury's *Aparajita Tumi*. His mystery stories on detective Kakababu he wrote for children such as *Sabuj Dweeper Raja* directed by Tapan Sinha, *Kakababu Here Gelen* and *Ek Tukro Chand* directed by Pinaki Choudhuri. Many of them turned into celluloid misadventures but he never expressed his displeasure with the films nor did he interfere into their making or dictate terms in any manner. The sole exception was when Deepa Mehta made her film *Water* that bore a strong resemblance to Sunil Gangopadhyay's epic novel *Ei Shomoy* but did not give him the credit for the source. The remaking of the film the second time (2005) did not raise any controversy but neither was it received well by the audience or the Indian critics. ■

(A tribute by Shoma A. Chatterji, freelance journalist, author and film scholar based in Kolkata.)

ESPNcricinfo, Affle join hands

Affle has announced an agreement with ESPNcricinfo for rich media advertising in India. As part of the agreement, Affle's recently launched rich media ad network, Ripple, will power some of the leading digital cricket destination's rich media advertising. The two companies will also work together to create customised digital media solutions for leading brands and agencies on ESPNcricinfo. ■

A short take on communication



A JOURNEY INTO THE WORLD OF MASS COMMUNICATION

Author: Mehak Jonjua

Publisher: Mohindra Capital Publishers, Chandigarh

Price: Rs 135

The author makes an attempt to touch on different aspects of Mass Communication in her book which appears more like a ready reckoner than a journey in depth. The content which covers a wide range of topics is mostly theoretical in nature apart from being extremely brief. The earlier chapters begin with communication models and theories followed by concepts in print and electronic media. The later chapters deal with Advertising, Public Relations, Commissions and Committees and Media Laws. However, the first is dealt at length with illustrations which thankfully pertain to the Indian context.

Discussing the several advantages and disadvantages of advertising, the author says it

cuts costs and create an attitude change among the buyers and result in a wastage of time and space besides making false claims about products in order to lure gullible people into purchasing them. The example cited in this context is a memory enhancing drug, Memory Plus; chess wizard Vishwanathan Anand claims to have been benefited by the product. "But Anand was a chess champion long before this product was developed and presumably had a keen memory even then. When the advertisements fail in their promises people become frustrated ..." says the author.

The 4 Ps in relation to advertising, the major types of advertising and the media used for the purpose are explained with examples. This slim volume will be useful to those in the field of advertising which is increasingly becoming challenging.

N. Meera Raghavendra Rao

(The reviewer is a freelance writer based in Chennai.)

The Civilian launched

Mankind Welfare Association has launched *The Civilian*, a mainstream news magazine in Hindi. The magazine has a cover price of Rs 15. The monthly will be available in all major cities and towns of Uttar Pradesh, all metros in India and select global hubs such as London, California, Toronto, Singapore, Malaysia, Sydney, Paris, and Sri Lanka that have a sizeable population of Hindi readers. Chetan Shukla, vice chairman of Mankind Welfare Association is the editor and publisher of the magazine. The Civilian is a political and current affairs news magazine. The initial print run is 20000 copies (18000 copies for India and the rest for other markets). The magazine comes with 40 pages and is printed on high quality gloss paper. ■

VIDURA

A JOURNAL OF THE PRESS INSTITUTE OF INDIA

T.C. No. TN/ENG05025/22/1/2008-TC R. Dis No. 1593/08

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Printed by **V.B.S. Moni** and published by **V.Murali** on behalf of **The Press Institute of India - Research Institute for Newspaper Development**, from RIND premises, Second Main Road, Taramani CPT Campus, Chennai 600 113 and printed at **Print Shop Private Limited**, 4/310 Gandhi Street, Kottivakkam, Old Mahabalipuram Road, Chennai 600 096. Editor: **Sashi Nair**

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